

A STUDY OF CHINA'S POSSIBLE MILITARY INTERVENTION
IN THE EVENT OF A SUDDEN CHANGE
IN NORTH KOREA

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF CHINA'S POSSIBLE MILITARY INTERVENTION IN THE EVENT OF A SUDDEN CHANGE IN NORTH KOREA by Major HakKeun Jin, 107 pages.

This study addresses potential scenarios as to how a North Korean collapse could occur, whether China's military would engage in North Korea, and how China's military might intervene if it did so.

First, regarding the likely scenarios for a North Korean collapse, this study looks at a power struggle, a military coup, or a popular uprising as potential scenarios of internal origin. Additionally, it discusses a military conflict between the two Koreas and U.S. military operations against North Korea as scenarios of conflict with an external origin.

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不怕慢只怕站

–Do not fear going slow, only fear standing still”

When I look back upon the past year at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, I remember facing numerous difficulties. Uncertainty about whether I could successfully complete the MMAS program weighed heavily on my heart; and my constant struggle with English tempted me to quit on numerous occasions.

However, each and every time I felt like giving up, my committee chair, Dr. Bjorge, expressed his confidence in my abilities and guided me. Without his support, I would not have been able to finish this study and enjoy this sense of accomplishment. I am indebted to him, and express my sincere gratitude. Additionally, I would like to thank Mr. Christie and Mr. Babb for their valuable feedback. This thesis would not be what it is today were it not for their comments.

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Finally, I express my deepest thanks to my family: my parents, Hoon-Sik Jin and Nam-Soo Han, who raised me; as well as my wife, Bo-Yoon Choi, and our daughter, Ye-Won Jin. Despite the miles between us, I felt their unwavering support and –good cheer” everyday in my heart. As a son, a husband, and as a father, I dedicate this thesis to them and express my deepest appreciation for their continuous encouragement.

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|-----|---------------------------------|
| DP | Displaced Persons |
| GA | Group Army |
| KPA | (North) Korean People's Army |
| MNF | Multinational Forces |
| MR | Military Region |
| PAP | People's Armed Police |
| PKF | Peacekeeping Forces |
| PKO | Peacekeeping Operations |
| PLA | People's Liberation Army |
| ROK | Republic of Korea (South Korea) |
| RRU | Rapid Reaction Unit |
| UN | United Nations |
| US | United States |
| WMD | Weapons of Mass Destruction |

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

North Korea is regarded as one of the most isolated, bellicose, and authoritarian countries in the world. It is also developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in spite of serious economic troubles and international isolation, and has wilfully committed terrorist acts and military provocation such as the bombing of the Korean Air Lines (KAL)-858 in 1987, sinking of the Republic of Korea (ROK) navy ship Cheonan in 2010, and the artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island in 2010. In addition, while the majority of its citizens experience a miserable life of severe oppression and starvation, the Kim family still enjoys a luxurious life. Contrary to the trend of globalization, because of its belief that the maintenance of authoritarian regime will be impossible even if it only pursues the Chinese style of opening and reform, North Korea has implemented an even stronger closed-door policy. Moreover, disregarding an effort to improve the people's living standards by developing the economy, the North Korean government has sought to maintain control by developing WMD, such as nuclear weapons and long range missiles, and by military provocations that are used to demand food and energy aid from neighboring countries.

Given this situation, what would happen if the North Korean regime collapsed? The collapse of the North Korean regime would be a very big event that would drastically change the political and economic order, not only on the Korean Peninsula, but also in Northeast Asia. A sudden change in North Korea first become a concern of the United States Forces-Korea (USF-K) in the early 1990s after the collapse of Eastern European communist countries, the death of Kim Il-sung (and the replacement by his son Kim

Jong-il), the first North Korean nuclear crisis, and massive hunger in North Korea due to the nation's food crisis. The issue has been discussed in great depths by politicians and scholars. However, contrary to expectations, the Kim Jong-il regime not only survived, it was fairly stable through the 1990s, thus pushing the discussion of sudden changes in North Korea to the side. However, due to Kim Jong-il's deteriorating health from the mid-2000s, the international community has again begun discussing the possibility of sudden changes in North Korea. The questionable abilities of the heir apparent, Kim Jong-un, who is only in his late 20s, the bad economic situation caused by the failure of currency reform, and the international sanctions imposed because of its nuclear weapons programs, have all made the possibility of sudden change in North Korea more and more likely.

The governments of the Republic of Korea and the United States (US) have been developing contingency plans called the "Concept plan 5029" for dealing with a sudden change of the North Korean regime. These plans include military actions. In 2011, when the ROK and US military conducted their combined exercise named "Key Resolve," for the first time they tested their preparation for such a dramatic event. Some say that it is very unlikely that there will be a sudden change in North Korea since Kim Jong-il's regime has been stable regardless of what outside experts have predicted. However, considering the great impact a sudden change would have, analyzing and preparing for such a possibility should not be overlooked—regardless of the likelihood of the actual event. Even if the possibility of a North Korean contingency arising from a sudden change is lower than one percent, it is absolutely important to be thoroughly prepared for it. This is necessary to protect the freedom, peace and property of South Korean citizens

and to seize what might be an important opportunity for the peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula.

Looking from the perspective of ROK national security, what factors should be considered when making a contingency plan for a North Korean collapse? These factors include the management of North Korean displaced persons (DP), securing North Korea's WMD (nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons) and weapons development capability, disarming the Korean People's Army (KPA) that consists of 1.2 million soldiers, stability operations, humanitarian support, and blocking the military intervention from the premiere military ally of North Korea, China. Among these factors, the matter of how China, which joined the Korean War to defend the North Korean regime, has been maintaining military alliance with North Korea, and which regards North Korea as a strategic buffer zone, would respond militarily to a North Korean collapse is a factor that has to be carefully considered when making plans to deal with such a collapse. Just as the Chinese intervention in the Korean War changed the war and blocked unification, it is evident that a Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) advance into the Korean Peninsula following a government collapse in North Korea would be one of the major variables shaping the outcome of the event. Thus, analyzing whether China would militarily intervene, as it did in the Korean War, and the possible forms of such an action, is one of the essential research tasks that South Korea and the United States have to undertake in order to successfully prepare for such a contingency.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine possible actions by China's PLA in the event of a North Korean collapse. This paper analyzes how a sudden change in North Korea might happen, discusses whether China's military would intervene again (as they

did during the Korean War), and then looks at how the PLA would intervene if the Chinese government decided to become involved militarily again in the Korean Peninsula. Most analyses only considered China's politico-diplomatic environment when it comes to the ways of Chinese military intervention. There has been no published research on how the PLA would intervene in North Korea based on an analysis of Chinese military capabilities (objectives, troops available, weapon systems, experiences in overseas operations, resources, etc). This study will address this area.

Research Questions

The primary research question of this study is how China's military might intervene in case of a North Korean collapse. Would it take unilateral action and try to block other countries' intervention? Would it form multinational forces (MNF) under the agreement of international society? Would it engage as a member of the Peacekeeping Forces (PKF) under the control of the United Nations (UN)? To answer this question, this paper deals with two secondary questions:

1. If sudden change occurs in North Korea, in what situation and in what ways would it happen?
2. Would China's military become engaged in a North Korean collapse?

Research Outline

This thesis is organized in the following manner. Chapter 2 compares and analyzes material on these topics that has been published in South Korea, the United States, and China. Chapter 3 examines the research methodology, the data used in this study, and how this data has been collected. In addition, it also lays out the analytical

framework for analyzing the research questions. Chapter 4 analyzes the possible scenarios of a potential North Korean collapse. Chapter 5 focuses on China's diplomacy and foreign policy, its Korean Peninsula policy, the Sino-North Korean relationship, the Sino-American relationship, the Sino-South Korean relationship, and China's national interests to assess the possibility of Chinese military involvement. Chapter 6 estimates what form a Chinese military intervention would likely take. Finally, chapter 7 concludes the thesis with a discussion of what South Korea needs to prepare for regarding a potential North Korean collapse and a Chinese military intervention.

Assumptions

The assumptions applied in this paper are as follows:

1. The fundamental assumption of this research is that North Korea will collapse.

While there are some who question the possibility of a sudden change in North Korea, this paper focuses on what China's military would do after such a collapse.

2. It is assumed that North Korea's nuclear issues will not be resolved by the Six-Party talks and that North Korea will continue its nuclear programs until the regime collapses.

3. It is assumed that South Korea will dispatch its army into North Korea to control and assist massive numbers of DP, conduct stability operations, and secure WMD. This assumption is based on the fact that South Korea regards a North Korean regime collapse as a serious threat to its own security and as an important opportunity for the reunification of the Peninsula. Thus, it has developed the Concept plan 5029, which has been practiced during the ROK-US combined exercise Key Resolve to prepare for this contingency.

4. It is assumed that when North Korea collapses, the United States will possibly deploy armed forces to North Korea to secure nuclear weapons. This assumption is based on the facts that the United States has seriously considered conducting military operations against North Korea's nuclear facilities and developed the Concept plan 5029 with South Korea.

Definition of Terms

Concept Plan (CONPLAN) 5029: Military plan established by the ROK-US Combined Forces Command (CFC) in order to respond to a North Korean collapse. Because of the political sensitivity of the issue, the plan has not been developed into an operational plan (OPLAN).

Key Resolve: Combined exercise between South Korea and the United States. The purpose of the exercise is to practice Reception, Staging, Onward movement, and Integration (RSOI) of the US forces into the Korean Peninsula. In 2008, in order to prepare for the transfer of operational control (OPCON) of military forces from the US to ROK, the focus of the exercise changed into supporting South Korea-led operations and the name of the exercise was changed from RSOI to Key Resolve. In 2011, for the first time, the exercise practiced responding to a North Korean collapse.¹

Korean People's Army (KPA): General term for North Korea's armed forces. The KPA consists of Army, Navy, and Air Force and it maintains about 1.2 million active duty soldiers and 7.7 million reservists.

¹Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Republic of Korea, <http://www.jcs.mil.kr/main.html> (accessed 12 February 2011).

Military alliance: A formal association of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, intended for either the security or the aggrandizement of its members against other states.² South Korea and the United States, and North Korea and China are maintaining military alliances respectively.

Multinational Operations: Operations conducted by forces of two or more nations, usually undertaken within the structure of a coalition or alliance. Other possible arrangements include supervision by an intergovernmental organization (IGO) such as the UN or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Commonly used terms under the multinational rubric include allied, bilateral, combined, combined/coalition or multilateral.³

North Korea: A communist country occupying above the 38th parallel of the Korean Peninsula. North Korea is synonymous with Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Peacekeeping Operations (PKO): Military operations undertaken with the consent of all major parties interested in a dispute. These operations are designed to monitor and facilitate implementation of an initial agreement (cease fire, truce, etc.) and support diplomatic efforts to reach a long-term political settlement. Such actions are often taken

²Glenn H. Snyder, "Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut," *Journal of International Affairs* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 104.

³Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-16, *Multinational Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2007), i-1.

under the authority of Chapter VI of the UN Charter, Peacekeeping Operations.⁴ PKO is conducted by military, police and civilian personnel, who work to deliver security, political, and other peace-building support.⁵

People's Liberation Army (PLA): General term for China's armed forces. The PLA consists of PLA Ground Force, PLA Navy, PLA Air Force, and PLA Second Artillery Corps.

Six-Party talks: Multinational talks on the North Korean nuclear weapons program and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Participating countries include South Korea, North Korea, the United States, China, Russia, and Japan.

South Korea: A democratic sovereign state located below the 38th parallel of the Korean Peninsula. South Korea is synonymous with Republic of Korea (ROK).

Stability Operations: An overarching term encompassing various military mission, tasks, and activities conducted in coordination with nonmilitary instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment and provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief. Stability operations are usually conducted to support a host-nation

⁴Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), vi-5.

⁵United Nations, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/> (accessed 20 February 2011).

government. However, stability operations may also support the efforts of a transitional civil or military authority when no legitimate government exists.⁶

Sudden change in North Korea: Events which cause a rapid disintegration of the political system of North Korea that can not be controlled by the North Korean government. In this study, the term “sudden change in North Korea” is synonymous with “collapse of North Korea” and “North Korean contingency.”

Limitations

The limitations applied in this paper are as follows:

This research excludes confidential government documents and all classified material, and uses open material only. Due to time and spatial constraints, it does not involve the collection of primary source material through fieldwork. Official documents that are produced in China are limited because China does not want to provoke the North Korean regime and thus does not openly refer to a North Korean contingency. Official documents that are published in North Korea are also limited because of the secretive nature of the North Korean regime. Because of these limitations, the main source of documentation on this sensitive topic is the open material produced by famous scholars, diplomats, media, North Korean defectors, and so on.

⁶Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-07, *Stability Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), 2-2, Glossary-9.

Delimitations

The delimitations applied in this paper are as follow:

1. This paper excludes the scenario that there might be a North Korean regime change brought about by a Chinese military occupation of North Korea. It can not be said that this scenario is not feasible, but since the purpose of this paper is to examine how China might militarily intervene after a North Korean collapse, this scenario would nullify the aims of this paper.

2. China, because of its close relationship with North Korea which is sometimes called as “blood alliance” (*xiemeng* - 血盟) or described as being as close as lips and teeth (*chunwang chihan* - 唇亡齿寒), might intervene in various non-military ways. However, this study is limited to military issues and excludes diplomatic, informational, and economic factors because the use of military force by China is the most sensitive and important area of concern for both the Republic of Korea and the United States.

3. Possible Chinese military advances into the Korean Peninsula are divided into three types or categories—single and unilateral operations, multi-national operations, and UN-led PKO. These three kinds of operations are the typical forms of military operations abroad conducted by nation states and it is believed that China would select one of these three types of interventions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews previous research regarding the three research questions addressed in this study. Once again, they are how North Korea might collapse, would China become militarily involved in the event of a North Korean collapse, and what type of military intervention would China select? Research into a North Korean contingency has been done in security research institutions and academia in South Korea, the United States, and other countries. Recently this topic has received increased international attention due to Kim Jong-il's deteriorating health, the apparent plan to pass power to Kim Jong-un, North Korea's severe economic troubles, the sinking of the South Korean navy ship Cheonan, and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island.

Scenarios for a North Korean Collapse

First, there are diverse opinions regarding the likely scenarios for a North Korean collapse. They include a military conflict between the two Koreas or a military coup d'état inside of North Korea, a political power struggle after Kim Jong-il's death, or a popular uprising because of authoritarian rule or increased economic difficulties. Many scholars and researchers feel that the death of Kim Jong-il could be a decisive and immediate cause for a North Korean collapse.

According to Lieutenant Colonel Hyung Cheol Jung, a student of the ROK Joint Forces Staff College, there are three possible external causes for a North Korean collapse, a military conflict between the two Koreas caused by North Korea's military provocations and military intervention in North Korea by either the US or China. Another

scenario is a clash within the North Korean regime caused by a power struggle within the ruling elite, a conflict between the military hardliners and reformists, or friction in the power transfer after Kim Jong-il's death. The third possible scenario is a clash from the bottom, e.g., a popular uprising due to economic troubles and authoritarian politics.⁷ Ki Dong Lee, a researcher of the Institute for National Security Strategy (INSS) in South Korea, forecasts that the North Korean collapse could have the form of a military coup in the event of Kim Jong-il's sudden death, or a popular uprising because of inhumane governing by the ruling class and severe economic woes.⁸ A paper by the Council on Foreign Relations of the US, written for the inauguration of president Obama in 2009, concludes that the death of Kim and the succession of his power will be a potential catalyst for a North Korean collapse. This paper describes three possible situations—managed succession, contested succession (or struggle), and failed succession—and foresaw that there would be a contingency if the succession failed. In addition, it concludes that if North Korea's power succession fails and the regime collapses, it will be followed by national chaos that would be much more severe than that which occurred in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the communist dictatorships.⁹

⁷Hyung Cheol Jung, "The prospect of Chinese military engagement in a North Korean collapse and South Korea's response" (Thesis, Joint Forces Staff College of the Republic of Korea, 2005), 7-12.

⁸Ki Dong Lee, "South Korea's response in the event of a North Korean collapse," 4 November 2009, http://www.kinu.or.kr/info/info_01_01.jsp?bid=REPORT01&ses=&page=1&mode=view&num=20649&dir=&order=&category=16&toname= (accessed 25 September 2010).

⁹Paul B. Stares and Joel S. Wit, "Preparing for Sudden Change in North Korea," *Council Special Report* no. 42 (January 2009): 10-15.

The Possibility of Chinese Military Intervention in case of a North Korean Collapse

Regarding China's military engagement in the event of a North Korean contingency, most of the research, especially from military or national security related governmental research institutes, predicts that the PLA will promptly get involved because of the Chinese-North Korea military alliance and the strategic value of North Korea. However, some academics and private research institutes argue that China will selectively engage according to the response of South Korea and the United States. They view possibility of direct Chinese military involvement as limited.

Those predicting Chinese military intervention in North Korea envision a number of possible scenarios. Sang Yoon Eom, a research fellow at the Sejong Institute, assumes that one effect of the North Korean attacks on the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong Island will be increase in Chinese aid to North Korea to prevent the collapse of the regime. He further argues that it is very likely that China, because it is a North Korean military ally and worries about DP fleeing en masse to China, will deploy a large number of PLA troops into North Korea if a North Korean collapse is imminent.¹⁰ Yong Shik Choo, a Deputy Chairman of the US-Korea Institute at School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), forecasts that the PLA will deploy into the northern part of the Korean Peninsula to keep the strategic buffer and administer the Yalu and Tumen river area.¹¹ Moreover,

¹⁰Sang Yoon Eom, "Increased tension in Northeast Asia and the future of the Korean Peninsula," *Current Issues and Policy* (September 2010): 10.

¹¹Yong Shik Choo, "US-Korea Cooperation in Case of North Korea's Emergency," *International Solidarity and Cooperation of North Korean Human Right Movement* (September 2009): 198.

the US Department of Defense (DoD) predicted for the first time in 2010 that China could send the PLA to the Korean Peninsula in the event of a North Korean contingency.¹² A 2009 publication of the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), which is under the US Army War College, concludes that there is a high likelihood of the Chinese PLA engaging in a North Korean collapse to stabilize the situation and gain control.¹³ In addition, Bonnie Glaser, a senior fellow with the Center for Strategy and International Studies (CSIS) Freeman Chair in China Studies, has determined, based on interviews with Chinese PLA officials and researchers, that China would prefer that a military intervention be led by the UN, but that China would swiftly intervene to take the initiative in the stability operation if international action was delayed and the situation in North Korea worsened. She argues that the PLA has already made an operational plan for military operations in case of a North Korean collapse.¹⁴

In contrast, Jae Ho Chung, a professor at Seoul National University, argues, based on interviews with certain influential Chinese scholars and government officials, that while China would engage in North Korean problems in a contingency, it would do so in diplomatic or other ways. He states that China would not unilaterally engage unless a

¹²U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, ~~“Military and Security Developments~~ involving the People’s Republic of China,” *Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 16.

¹³Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell, *Beyond the Strait: PLA Missions Other Than Taiwan* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, September 2009), 345-348.

¹⁴Bonnie Glaser, Scott Snyder, and John S. Park, ~~“Keeping an Eye on an Unruly~~ Neighbor: Chinese Views of Economic Reform and Stability in North Korea,” *United States Institute of Peace Working Paper* (3 January 2008), 10-15.

combined ROK-US force advanced into North Korea. In his view, if the South Korean Army alone advanced into North Korea, it is possible that China would accept such a move without becoming military involved.¹⁵ Seung Joo Baek, who is a director of the center for security and strategy at Korea Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA), argues that it is very unlikely for China, considering its relationship with South Korea and the United States, to directly intervene militarily in North Korea as it did during the Korean War.¹⁶ Tae Hwan Lee, a senior fellow of the Sejong Institute, said that China will decide on its military engagement according to the situation in North Korea, and suggested the low possibility of China's military involvement due to the fact that not only could unilateral deployment of the PLA cause concern in neighboring countries, but also that China would feel a burden of unilateral engagement without a discussion with the UN, South Korea, and the US.¹⁷

The Potential Types of Chinese Military Intervention

The majority of writers who think that China would intervene militarily argue that China, which regards North Korea as strategically very important, would unilaterally

¹⁵Jae Ho Chung, "Chinese military intervention at time of North Korean contingency depends on the U.S.," Radio Free Asia, 30 September 2010, http://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/chinese_army-09302010164555.html (accessed 1 October 2010).

¹⁶Seung Joo Baek, "Debate on International Management in case of North Korean Emergency," *International Solidarity and Cooperation of North Korean Human Right Movement* (September 2009), 188.

¹⁷DailyNK, "China's unilateral military involvement is unlikely," 18 August 2010, <http://www.dailynk.com/korean/read.php?cataId=nk05000&num=86117> (accessed 27 September 2010).

deploy the PLA while blocking other countries' involvement. In contrast, some forecast that, to take the initiative in the Korean Peninsula, China's PLA would engage as a member of a multi-national force. Others argue that China would engage with the agreement of the UN and under the control of the UN PKF in the consideration of its international image.

Bruce Klingner, a senior research fellow for Northeast Asia at the Heritage Foundation's Asian Studies Center, takes the position that when North Korea is in an uncontrollable situation, China would block other countries' military involvement and could also send the PLA into the Korean Peninsula to conduct humanitarian assistance, and secure WMD, including nuclear weapons.¹⁸ In addition, Tae Woo Kim, a senior analyst of the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA), argues that China, which has a legal basis of international law and rules, according to the 1961 "China-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance" (*zhongchao youhao hezuo huzhu tiaoyue*—中朝友好合作互助条约), can unilaterally intervene in the Korean Peninsula either when North Korea asks or at China's independent will even without North Korean request.¹⁹

In contrast, Changhee Park, a professor of the Korean National Defense University, argues that even though China could unilaterally enter North Korea to prevent

¹⁸Bruce Klingner, "New Leaders, Old Dangers: What North Korean Succession Means for the U.S.," The Heritage Foundation (7 April 2010), 9-11.

¹⁹Tae Woo Kim, "Change of the North Korean regime and the role of South Korea: Is international management possible?" *How to respond to a North Korean collapse*, The first seminar of North Korean Committee, Zeitgeist (14 October 2008), 35.

the worsening of the situation at the first hint of a North Korean collapse, it would prefer a China-led multinational operation over unilateral involvement.²⁰ In addition, Park argues that, even though intervening in North Korea as a part of an UN-led PKO could be a way to receive legitimacy from international society, China would prefer not to have a PKO because a PKO would not support China's strategic interests on the Korean Peninsula. These strategic interests include rebuilding a pro-China government, exercising dominant influence over North Korea, and maintaining a strategic buffer from the US.

There are some who say that China would deploy a PKF under the control of the UN. Bonnie Glaser argues that China could send troops to recover North Korean stability in a North Korean contingency, but before doing so, it would actively make an effort through the UN to be sanctioned by the international society.²¹ Scott Snyder, a director of the center for US-Korea policy of the Asia Foundation, and Joel Wit, a visiting fellow of Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), also conclude that China would dispatch a PKF under the control of the UN in a North Korean contingency.²² Byung Kwang Park, a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Strategy (INSS), argues that China, considering the backlash from the neighboring and interested countries—South Korea, the United States, and Japan—and the

²⁰Changhee Park, "North Korean contingency and Prospects of China's military intervention," *National Strategy* 16, no. 1 (2010): 51-54.

²¹Glaser, Snyder, and Park, 19.

²²Scott Snyder and Joel Wit, "Chinese Views: Breaking the Stalemate on the Korean Peninsula," *Special Report*, United States Institute of Peace (February 2007), 7.

political and economic burden in maintaining North Korean stability, combined with concern over maintaining China's international image, would avoid unilateral military intervention and rather engage through the UN.²³

Summary

The summary of research included in the literature review is as follows:

First, there is a general consensus on four scenarios that would lead to a sudden change in North Korea. They are a military coup or civil war in North Korea, a popular uprising because of the dictatorship and worsening economic situation, a military conflict between the two Koreas caused by the North's armed provocation, and US military operations against the North. Most significantly, they all foresee that there is an increased possibility of a contingency occurring due to power struggle if Kim Jong-il suddenly dies.

Second, on the issue of a Chinese PLA intervention in a North Korean collapse, most writers argue that China will swiftly intervene because of its military alliance with North Korea, the strategic value of North Korea, the need to cut off DP from North Korea, and the desire to control the Chinese-North Korean border. A few writers argue that China will not intervene if the South Korean army moves into North Korea independently, but will intervene if either US forces or a ROK-US combined force advance. Some argue that it is very unlikely for China to militarily intervene in consideration of the relationship with neighboring countries and her international image.

²³Byung Kwang Park, "China's position on a North Korean collapse," *Academy of east Asian Studies*, 3 November 2008, http://www.inss.re.kr/app/board/view.act?metaCode=s_intr_ac&boardId=6ac041dba3c73e6eed3909c (accessed 26 September 2010).

Third, with regards to what form a Chinese military intervention in the Korean Peninsula would take, most analysts argue that China would independently intervene while blocking other countries' involvement. A few argue that China would intervene in the form of a China-led multinational operation or an UN-sanctioned intervention. However, most argue the possibility of Chinese military intervention based on an analysis of Chinese foreign policy and Chinese policy toward North Korea, South Korea, and the United States. No research into Chinese military capabilities to intervene and conduct military operations in North Korea has yet appeared.

The next chapter describes and discusses the research methodology used in this study. It will explain how the study approaches the research questions and explain the analytical framework it uses.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper, based on the fundamental assumption that North Korea will collapse, deals with possible scenarios of a North Korean collapse, the possibility of China's military intervention in different scenarios, and the different ways in which the Chinese could intervene militarily. This chapter explains the methodology of the analytical framework of the paper, how the research materials were obtained, and how the analytical framework will be applied to that material to answer the research questions.

How to Classify the Scenarios of a North Korean Collapse

There are basically two kinds of scenarios of a North Korean collapse. One involves internal conflicts. The other involves a conflict with the outside world. Considering the military alliance between the two countries, whether or not China would intervene militarily in North Korea would be strongly influenced by whether the collapse was caused by internal conflict or by conflict with the outside. An internal conflict could arise from the sudden death of Kim Jong-il, a power struggle, severe economic troubles, large scale environmental disasters, a popular uprising, or a military coup.

This paper combines these internal problems into three scenarios: a political power struggle (caused by the sudden death of Kim Jong-il, and/or a dispute among the ruling elite), a military coup, or a popular uprising (caused by oppressive policies, severe economic troubles, or a large scale environmental disaster). Conflicts with the outside become two scenarios, a military conflict between the two Koreas or US military operations against North Korean nuclear facilities. As mentioned in chapter 1, this study

excludes the external scenario that a North Korean collapse might be caused by the Chinese military occupation of North Korea, because this scenario would nullify the purpose of this paper.

How to Assess the Possibility and Probability of a Chinese Military Intervention

To determine the likelihood of a Chinese military intervention, this paper analyzes factors influencing Chinese national security strategy. The framework for conducting this analysis is shown in figure 1.

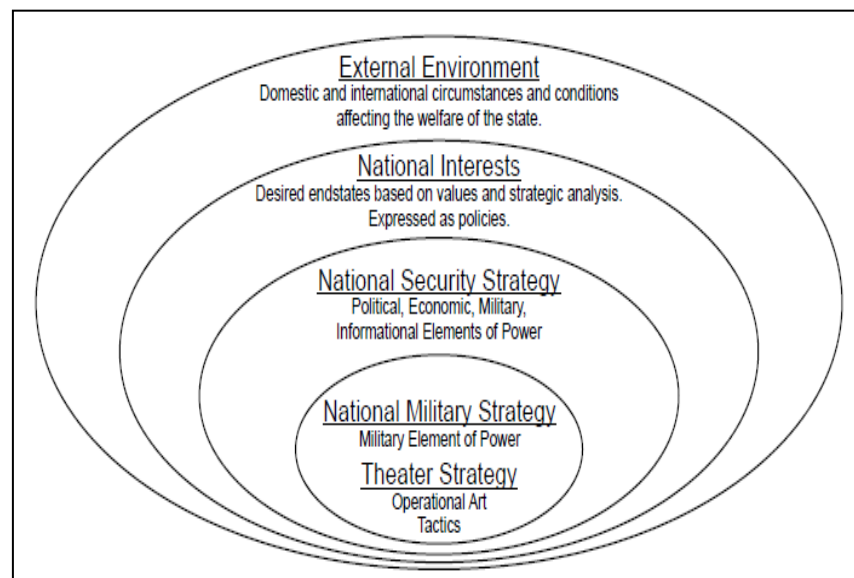


Figure 1. Comprehensiveness of strategy

Source: US Army War College, *Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 2006), 110.

This framework was developed at the US Army War College to illustrate how national security strategy is developed and how national military strategy and theater

strategy fit into national security strategy. According to the US Army War College, in order to establish a proper strategy, all the factors regarding the strategic environment have to be considered. National security strategy must be based on a through analysis of the external environment and national interests.²⁴ After that, national military strategy and theater strategy can be formed.

Following this framework, this study examines China's external environment and national interests in order to develop a picture of China's broad foreign policy goals and strategy and its more specific goals and strategy related to the Korean Peninsula. In addition, it examines how the relationships with North Korea (a current military ally), with South Korea (a rapidly developing economic trading partner), and with the United States (a military ally of South Korea and a major concern in Chinese foreign policy) have evolved to their present state. It then looks at how the collapse of North Korea would affect Chinese national interests and thereby influence China's national strategy, national military strategy, and its theater strategy regarding the Korean Peninsula.

How to Compare the Potential Types of Chinese Military Intervention

A Chinese military intervention into the Korean Peninsula for reasons related to national security strategy, national military strategy and theater strategy, would probably be one of the three following types—single and unilateral operations, multi-national operations, or UN-led PKO. These are the typical types of military operations abroad and

²⁴US Army War College, *Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 2006), 109-110.

also the most frequently mentioned in the case of a Chinese military advance into the Korean Peninsula.

In order to analyze what form of military action China would take to meet its national security strategy level objectives, this paper applies “a model for military strategy” developed by Arthur F. Lykke Jr. This is the basic theory of figure 1 and the “strategy formulation model” of the US Army. Lykke argues that ends, ways, and means are the three legs supporting military strategy. He defines ends as military objectives, ways as various methods that project military force, and means as military resources—manpower, materiel, money, forces, and logistics—used to accomplish a mission. In addition, he emphasizes that the three legs not only have to exist but also need to be well balanced in order for a military strategy and military operations to be successful. As shown in figure 2, when available concepts and resource are limited compared to the objectives, or objectives unrealistically exceed the means available, risk increases and the possibility of accomplishing the objectives decreases.²⁵

²⁵Arthur F. Lykke, ed., *Military Strategy: Theory and Application* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 1998), 3-8.

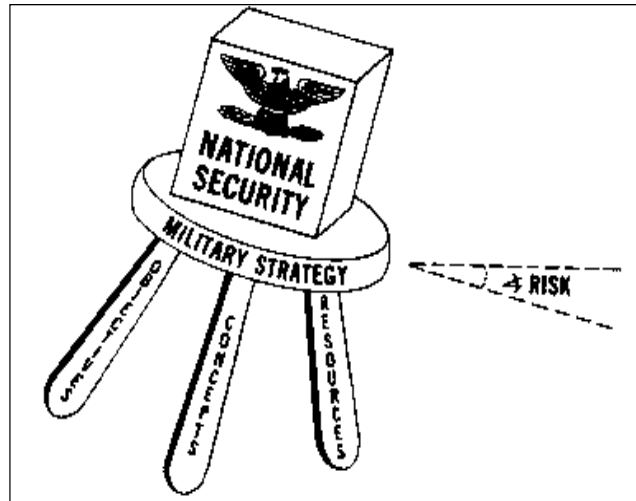


Figure 2. A model for military strategy

Source: Arthur F. Lykke, ed., *Military Strategy: Theory and Application* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 1998), 3-8.

US military doctrine emphasizes that ends, ways, and means should be efficiently integrated to make a favorable situation for the accomplishment of the national strategic end state while minimizing risk. In other words, to accomplish operational or strategic objectives, four factors—the conditions required to achieve the objectives (ends), the sequence of actions that is most likely to create those conditions (ways), the resources required to accomplish that sequence of actions (means), and the likely cost or risk in performing that sequence of actions (risks)—must be considered and have to be integrated in harmony.²⁶

²⁶Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), iv-1-2; Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), 6-4-5.

Colonel Dale Eikmeier, an instructor for the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) at the US Army Command and General Staff College and for the Army War College, argues that this model is not only useful in setting up a strategy for friendly forces, but also can be applied in analyzing an opponent's military strategy, such as when evaluating strengths and weaknesses, and the Center of Gravity (COG).²⁷

This paper applies Lykke's military strategy model to the three potential military intervention types that China may choose. It then tries to determine the most likely type of intervention at the military strategic level for the Chinese military. It does this by establishing the links between the levels of theater strategy, national military strategy, and national security strategy. This is done by analyzing and comparing the following: What are the ends and are they accomplishable? Does the PLA have the ways and means to achieve these ends? Are the three factors in figure 2 in harmony? What risks are there? By answering these questions, this paper will determine what the logic of the model states would be the "most likely course of action" for a Chinese military intervention, rather than the "most dangerous course of action" that concerns South Korea and the United States the most. Figure 3 shows the analytical framework for this study through which the methodology is applied to the research questions.

²⁷Dale C. Eikmeier, "A Logical Method for Center-Of-Gravity Analysis," *Military Review* (September-October 2007): 63.

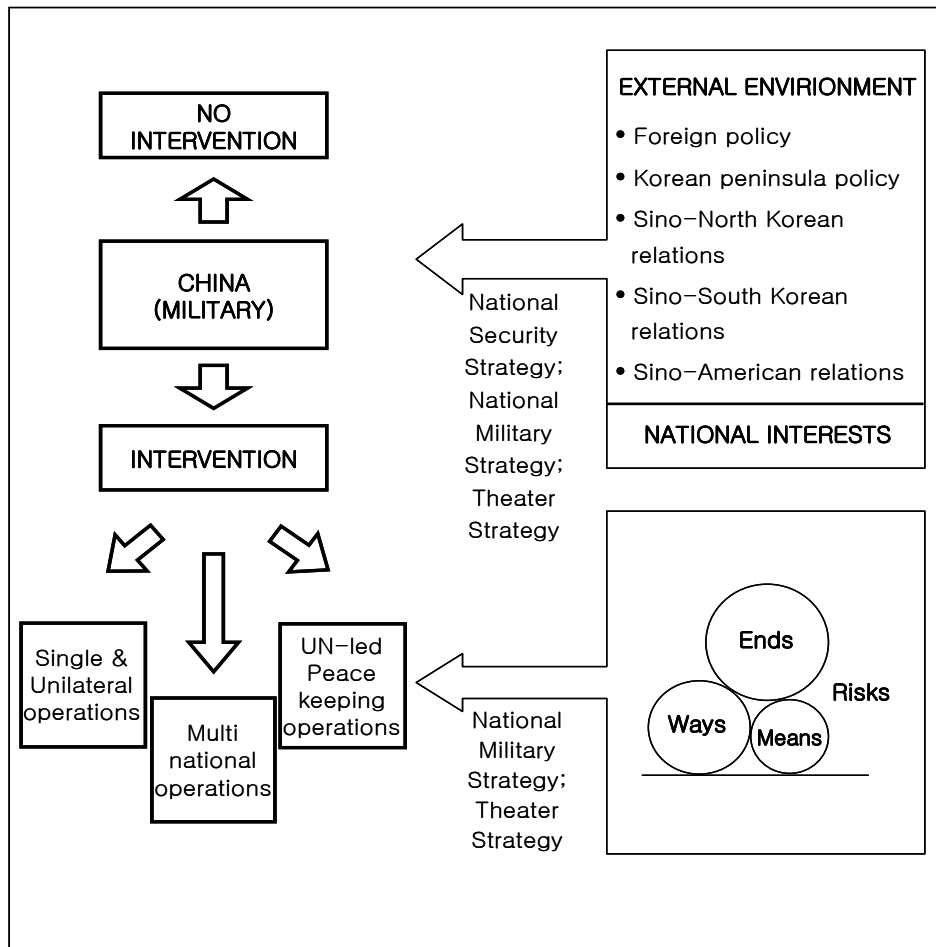


Figure 3. Analytical Framework

Source: Created by author.

The factors shaping the development of national security strategy, namely, the external environment and national interests, are laid out in the upper right portion of figure 3. The arrow pointing to the Chinese military depicts the emergence of Chinese national security strategy, national military strategy and theater strategy following an analysis of China's external environment and national interests by the Chinese leadership. They will decide whether or not China should intervene militarily in North Korea. If the

Chinese government chooses to intervene militarily, the intervention will be one of the three types in the boxes below the intervention box.

Selecting the best type of intervention operation will very much be a national military strategy–theater strategy level decision and will be based on an analysis of ends, ways, means, and risks. This relationship is illustrated by the box from Lykke’s model in the lower right side of figure 3 and the national military strategy–theater strategy arrow extending from the ends-ways-means-risks box toward the three possible types of operation. In summary, figure 3 shows the factors China’s political and military leaders will have to consider as they develop strategies and courses of action to deal with a sudden collapse of the North Korean government and the chaotic results such a collapse would produce.

This research is based on numerous books, papers, and seminar materials that have been published by prominent scholars and independent research institutes on the matter of the security environment in Northeast Asia, the Korean Peninsula, the North Korean contingency, China’s diplomatic and security policies, Sino-North Korean relations, Sino-South Korean relations, and Sino-American relations. The data for this thesis also comes from materials that have been published by each government’s organization and research institutes. In addition, considering the increased international recognition of the possibility of a sudden change in North Korea, this paper also uses various international, as well as Korean, media materials on the North Korean contingency, the possibility of China’s military involvement, and the potential responses of South Korea and the United States.

CHAPTER 4

SCENARIOS FOR A NORTH KOREAN COLLAPSE

Under what circumstance would the North Korean regime lose control over North Korea and make foreign intervention unavoidable? In this study, the scenarios of sudden change in North Korea are analyzed by first classifying them into two categories: an internal conflict-driven collapse such as a political power struggle, a military coup d'état followed by Kim Jong-il's death or a popular uprising provoked by brutal oppression or economic difficulties; and an external conflict-driven collapse caused by a military conflict between the two Koreas or US military operations against North Korea.

Internal Conflict

Political Power Struggle

Throughout the recent deterioration of Kim Jong-il's health, the international media has shown a great deal of interest who will succeed him. Most of them pointed at one of Kim Jong-il's three sons, Kim Jong-nam, Kim Jong-chul or Kim Jong-un as Kim's successor. Some have asserted that there might not be a third generation of Kim dynasty succession. Despite these predictions, at the time of this thesis it appears that Kim Jong-un will be Kim Jong-il's successor because North Korea officially appointed him to be the successor by appointing him as the Vice chairman of the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of North Korea in September of 2010.

However, most believe that this third generation of dictatorial succession to Kim Jong-un will not be smooth. The power struggle between Kim Jong-nam (eldest son) who is residing in China and Kim Jong-un has been observed in many places over time. Kim

Jong-nam, who is known to be receiving Chinese support, revealed his opposition to a third generation of dynastic succession in the media.²⁸ Kim Jong-un attempted to assassinate Kim Jong-nam²⁹ and Kim Jong-il has made a special request to the Chinese President, Hu Jintao, to ensure Kim Jong-nam's safety. Kim Jong-il wants to avoid bloodshed between his two sons,³⁰ but it appears that a keen struggle is already in progress. This situation of the power struggle between Kim Jong-un, the appointed heir with a weak power base, and Kim Jong-nam, who receives strong Chinese support, and the competition between their respective factions will accelerate uncontrollably should Kim Jong-il die, and possibly resulting in a violent crisis in North Korea.³¹

Military Coup d'état or Civil War

Military coup d'état or civil war is another possible cause of a North Korean collapse. The North Korean regime has been carrying out a "military-first" policy and, Kim Jong-il's power over the military is estimated to be absolute. However, the

²⁸DongA.com, "Kim Jong-nam is against North Korea's 3rd generation hereditary succession," 12 November 2010, <http://news.donga.com/Politics/3/00/20101012/31796204/1> (accessed 26 January 2011).

²⁹DongA.com, "Kim Jong-un failed assassinating his brother Kim Jong-nam," 29 September 2010, <http://news.donga.com/Politics/3/00/20100929/31477823/1> (accessed 26 January 2011).

³⁰MK news, "Power struggle among princes in North Korea?," 15 October 2010, <http://news.mk.co.kr/v3/view.php?year=2010&no=558286&sID=301> (accessed 26 January 2011).

³¹According to a survey taken by the World Futures Forum (WFF) in 2010, 52.3 percent of the surveyees anticipated that a power struggle will outbreak in North Korea after Kim Jong-il's death. ChosunBiz.com, "Power struggle in North Korea," 11 August 2010, http://biz.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/08/11/2010081101313.html (accessed 27 January 2011).

possibility of military coup has been steadily rising. In the late 1990s, there were three known attempts of military coups in North Korea.³² There still exists a serious conflict between the pro-China military officers favoring a Chinese-style reformation and opening for an economic development of North Korea, and the hard-liners favoring the status quo of protecting their self interests.³³ Additionally, due to the country's deteriorating economic situation, food distribution even within the KPA has become difficult so that the number of deserters and hospitalized soldiers is drastically increasing. Some deserters are known to pillage civilians and become involved in drug trafficking. The discipline of the military is unraveling in an unprecedented manner. Furthermore, it is known that a riot led by 400-500 KPA officers, occurred in January of 2011 and was suppressed by the KPA.³⁴

Within these developments, when Kim Jong-il who is the central power of the military dies, the possibility of a conflict between the hard-liners and the reformers may finally surface and if a military coup or civil war occurs as a result, it will become the

³²Yeonhap News, "Three coup d'état attempts in North Korea," 30 November 2010, <http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=100&oid=001&aid=0004796462> (accessed 27 January 2011).

³³It is known that some high level officers of the North Korean military and high level officials were exiled to China. Some assert that China will possibly induce a Chinese style reform through these exiled North Korean officers and officials which means a China-driven coup d'état might occur in North Korea. Newsweek international, "China's reaction: Tightening the screws," 30 October 2006, <http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=100&oid=143&aid=0000042173> (accessed 27 January 2011).

³⁴nK Intellectuals Solidarity, "Hungered North Korean soldiers refuse to work," 7 February 2011, <http://www.nkis.kr/> (accessed 10 February 2011).

incident shaking the foundation of the North Korean regime, which has maintained its strong dictatorship based on the military might of the KPA.

Popular Uprising

A popular uprising may also occur. The long lasting famine combined with the oppressive politics in North Korea has steadily expanded the people's discontent with Kim Jong-il's family, and it is known that North Korean people's fatigue with a third Kim is spreading rapidly following the recent decision for the dynastic succession. During the late 1990s, the period commonly known as —the march of hardship” in North Korea, about 330,000 people died from starvation. And, recently, because of North Korea's nuclear brinkmanship and various other military provocations, even the international aid was halted exacerbating the food shortage.³⁵ Meanwhile, North Korean people's anti-Kim Jong-un sentiment seems to be growing rapidly daily.³⁶

North Korea has employed multiple observation system by the military and intelligence agencies, and public executions to intimidate and control its people. Therefore, North Korean people, to some degree, have become accustomed to their brutal oppression. However, after Kim Jong-il's death, if anti-regime sentiments spread systematically due to a mixture of discontent over severe economic difficulties,

³⁵In 2010, the World Food Program (WFP) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced that more than 1.5 million tons of food is short in North Korea. Yeonhap News, —Food shortage in North Korea,” 13 October 2010, <http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=100&oid=001&aid=004705898> (accessed 29 January 2011).

³⁶Seoul Finance, —The general should die soon . . . Kim Jong-un is a baby pig!,” 16 May 2010, <http://www.seoulfn.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=84134> (accessed 29 January 2011).

oppressive politics, and people's anti-sentiment against Kim Jong-un, a popular uprising similar to the one in Romania in the past and recently in Egypt, Libya, and Syria can become a possible scenario in North Korea. Especially, if the uprising leads to a large-scale massacre of the people by the North Korean military, as many would expect, further deterioration of the situation will lead to a call for humanitarian intervention by the international community as witnessed in Lybia, March of 2011.

External Conflict

North Korean Military Provocation

As for the externally caused collapse of North Korea, a North Korean military provocation that elicited a strong South Korean military response is one possibility. Since the armistice agreement was signed in 1953, even in the last several decades, North Korea has been committing various acts of terrorism and military provocations against South Korea. In 2010, North Korea sank the Cheonan, a South Korean warship, using torpedo attacks, as well as striking Yeonpyeong Island with artillery shells, resulting civilian casualties. Because of these provocations, South Korean public opinion now calls for massive retaliation in kind, and to show more latitude against these provocations.³⁷

The South Korean government made numerous warnings against North Korea that it will neutralize the source of the attack if North Korea repeats such acts.

³⁷According to the survey in January of 2011, 63.5 percent of the surveyees said there is a high possibility of North Korea's re-provocation. 50.9 percent answered that South Korea should attack the source of the provocation and 31.4 percent suggested a strong retaliation to the irrecoverable level of the provoked unit. MBC news, "MBC survey," 1 January 2011, http://imnews.imbc.com/replay/nwdesk/article/2770677_5780.html (accessed 29 January 2011).

North Korean attacks on the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong Island are thought to be one of North Korea's attempts to reinforce its national solidarity during the regime transition to Kim Jong-un. In other words, the military provocations might have occurred as a method to strengthen the influence of Kim Jong-un on the military leadership, as he currently has a weak support base within the military, or as a result of competing loyalty toward Kim Jong-un among other potential national leaders, and therefore have a high possibility of being repeated in the future.³⁸ If the North Korean regime sees that it is confronted with the danger of an imminent regime collapse, the possibility of initiating a large-scale military attack against South Korea can not be excluded.

However, if the provocation is repeated, South Korea, based on its citizens' currently strong support for massive retaliation, may choose to strike back immediately. Therefore, if the North provokes again, the South may not hesitate to retaliate and, if the military conflict between the two Koreas becomes severe, the resulting chaos may accelerate deterioration of the North Korean regime, ultimately leading to its collapse.

US Military Operations against North Korea

A second possibility of an externally caused collapse is a US military operation against North Korea to prevent North Korea from developing the capability to attack the US with WMD. North Korea, named as one of the "Axis of evil" countries along with Iran and Iraq by President George W. Bush in 2002, possesses a large quantity of chemical and biological weapons, and after two nuclear tests, is judged to have a certain

³⁸MBC news, "Gates, North Korea's provocation is related to the power succession," 14 August 2010, http://imnews.imbc.com/replay/nwtoday/article/2678594_5782.html (accessed 29 January 2011).

number of nuclear weapons. However, the US, having attacked Iraq to eliminate the al-Qaeda terrorist group and prevent WMD proliferation, will not allow North Korea, another member state of the axis of evil, to become a direct threat to the US. Therefore, even though the US is making efforts for a peaceful resolution on the North Korean nuclear issue through the Six-Party talks, it is possible that the US will not exclude conducting offensive or kinetic military operations against the nuclear facilities in North Korea.

In fact, in 1993, when North Korea withdrew from Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and resumed its nuclear program, the Clinton administration came close to conducting a surgical strike on the nuclear facilities in Yongbyon area.³⁹ In 2003, President George W. Bush warned the former President of China, *Jiang Zemin* that he may attack North Korea if the nuclear issue was not resolved diplomatically.⁴⁰ In addition, in 2006 the Bush administration seriously considered using surgical interception and strike against Daepodong missile facilities when North Korea launched two ballistic missiles.⁴¹

Considering these recent examples, if North Korea continues developing nuclear and long range missile programs, and if their technology is recognized as a direct threat

³⁹Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2004), 591, 602-603; Chae-Jin Lee, *A Troubled Peace: U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 170-171.

⁴⁰George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), 420-426.

⁴¹Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (Washington, DC: Sentinel HC, 2011), 613-615.

to the homeland security of the US, or if the safety of WMD in North Korea is assessed to be insecure due to the rising instability in the country, US military operations against North Korea will have a very high possibility for realization regardless of whether the Republicans or the Democrats are in power. Even if the US military operations are limited to the nuclear facilities in North Korea, it will have lethal impact on the very existence of the North Korean regime.

Summary

This chapter examined the first research question, “how sudden change in North Korea might happen” based on the fundamental assumption that a North Korean collapse is quite possible. Three scenarios of a collapse driven by internal conflict were presented: a political power struggle during the power succession or after Kim Jong-il’s death, a military coup or civil war caused by a conflict between pro-China officers supporting Chinese style reform and the hard-liners in the military, and a popular uprising caused by extreme economic difficulties and long-term oppression. The possibility of a collapse driven by external conflict, military conflict between the two Koreas caused by North Korean provocation, and the US military operations against North Korea were discussed as the likely scenarios. In the next chapter, the influences of China’s external environment and its national interests on China’s national strategic level decisions will be examined. The likelihood of a Chinese military intervention on the Korean Peninsula based on the internal and external scenarios of a North Korean collapse, will be analyzed respectively.

CHAPTER 5

THE POSSIBILITY OF A CHINESE MILITARY INTERVENTION IN NORTH KOREA

In the case of sudden change in North Korea, would China's military intervene on the Korean Peninsula? China will most likely make a full effort, employing various methods in politics, diplomatic, military, civilian sectors, to prevent the collapse of the North Korean regime. Here, the possibility of Chinese military intervention is examined at the national security strategic level. As shown in figure 3 on page 26, China's national security strategy is shaped by the external environment and national interests. This chapter examines Chinese foreign policy, China's Korean Peninsula strategy, Sino-North Korean relations, Sino-South Korean relations, Sino-American relations, and the correlations between North Korean collapse and China's national interests. Based on that examination, the possibility and probability of a Chinese military intervention in the internal and external conflicts-driven collapses will be presented respectively.

China's External Environment

China's Foreign Policy

Traditionally, China has generally interpreted and viewed international politics with a realist's perspective that a state is the main actor in the international relationship. Sovereignty, territorial unification, maintenance of the socialist system and ideology, economic development, and increasing international influence have been considered the key elements of China's national interests. Especially, following the economic reform since the 1980s, economic development has been regarded as the highest priority of

national interests and China's national power has been focused on it.⁴² Increasingly, China's foreign policy has been influenced more by its societal-cultural characteristics than the communist ideology and put emphasis on constant change in international politics as a premises as well as justification of policy adjustments based on international changes. Additionally, China's foreign policy is state-centered and relation-oriented, and emphasizes moralist thinking such as the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence" (*heping gongcun wuxiang yuanze* – 和平共存五项原则).⁴³

In retrospect, in the 1950s, China carried out an anti-American and anti-Western policy depending only on the support from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The most important reason for this was the tremendous support from the Soviet Union for the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). One of the chief reasons for Chinese participation in the Korean War was China's anti-American and pro-Soviet policy. However, after the Korean War and Stalin's death, China's pro-Soviet policy which aimed to confront the threat from the United States, by maintaining solidarity with the Soviets began to change. In the late 1950s, the outbreak of the Sino-Soviet border disputes altered the relationship of the two countries to one of confrontation ideologically and strategically.

⁴²Young-Nam Cho, *China's Politics in Hu Jintao Era* (Seoul: Nanam Press, 2006), 215-220.

⁴³Jisi Wang, "International Relations Theory and the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy: A Chinese Perspective," in, *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, ed., Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 481-505.

In the 1960s, devising an “Intermediate zone theory” (*zhongjian didailun* – 中间地带论), China established an extensive united front connecting various socialist countries and the international proletarians in opposition to the US-led imperialism, and carried out an anti-America and anti-Soviet policy against American imperialism and Soviet hegemonism.

In the 1970s, China showed the most important change since the nation’s establishment, moving away from the effects of the Cultural Revolution, which had caused the isolation of China in the international society. In this period, China abandoned the extreme-left foreign policy line, established a connection with its former ideological enemy, the United States, and adopting an anti-Soviet policy against Soviet hegemonism.

In the 1980s, under Deng Xiaoping, China carried out an independent self-reliant diplomacy. In other words, China chose to improve relationships with countries helpful to its national interests without being biased towards an ideology or a nation to concentrate on economic development, the highest objective of Chinese government.⁴⁴ During this period, China tried to grow its national power based on the principle of “Hide our Capabilities and Bide our Time” (*taoguang yanghui* – 韬光养晦) as the motto of its new foreign policy. However, after China’s bloody suppression of student demonstrations in the Tiananmen Incident in June 1989, China faced strong international sanctions and criticism on its record of human right from Western nations led by the United States. Additionally, during the 1990s, a “China threat theory,” which sees China’s rapid

⁴⁴For China’s reform under Deng, see Chae-Jin Lee, *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1996), 142.

economic and military growth as a threat to global stability, appeared not only in the US, but also among its Asian neighbors. Because of the US-led Western sanctions and the appearance of the China threat theory, China judged that the US was perhaps trying to contain China's rise.⁴⁵

China understood that establishing a peaceful and stable international environment was advantageous to continuous economic development. China also perceived a need to counter what it viewed as a Western effort at containing China, led by the United States. Therefore, the existing passive foreign policy focusing on a small number of countries was converted into an omni-directional foreign policy. Starting in the late 1990s, with a new confidence in its national power, China advocated a "Responsible Greater China," based on a "Having something worthwhile to do" (*yousuo zuowei* - 有所作为) and actively promoted a new omni-directional and multilateralist policy. Pursuing a "New Security Concept," (*xin anquanguan* - 新安全观) China dispatched PKO to areas including Cambodia and East Timor, and sought to perform important roles in UN-led PKO as a functioning and contributing member of the international community.⁴⁶ Also, in order to build the perception in neighboring countries that it was a "good neighbor nation," China pursued active cooperation with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference (APEC), and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to the south. To the north, based on its

⁴⁵For the China threat theory, see Young-Nam Cho, 206-210, 307-312.

⁴⁶For China's perception in security issues after the Cold War and its security strategy, see Weilie Shen and Lu Junyuan, *China's National Security* (Beijing: Shishi Press, 2001), 84-93.

“First Security, Later Economy” policy, China pursued military confidence building and common economic development through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).⁴⁷

In addition, in November 2002, when Hu Jintao became General Secretary of the Communist Party, China began reinforcing its soft power and replaced the passive foreign policy and announced “Peaceful Rise” (*heping jueqi* – 和平崛起) as its new policy under the goal of continuous economic development and becoming a global power in the international society.⁴⁸

In short, the central goals of Chinese foreign policy have become the establishment of a peaceful and stable international environment for its continuous economic development while simultaneously expanding China’s international influence and countering potential attempts at containing China, led by the United States.⁴⁹ If these two goals collide with each other, China is expected to give the former a higher priority

⁴⁷Jianwei Wang, “China’s Multilateral Diplomacy in the New Millennium,” in *China Rising: Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy*, eds., Yong Deng and Fei-Lin Wang (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 159-200; Shanghai Cooperation Organization was primarily founded to lower tensions along the Sino-Russian borders. Young-Nam Cho (2006), 285-286; China’s Research Institute for Contemporary International Relations, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization: New Security Concept and New Regime* (Beijing: Shishi Press, 2002), 1-46.

⁴⁸For the transition of China’s foreign policy, see Thomas W. Robinson, “Chinese Foreign Policy from the 1940s to the 1990s,” in *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, ed., Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 555-602; For China’s soft power, see Young-Nam Cho and Jong Ho Jeong, “China’s Soft Power: Discussions, Resources, and Prospects,” *Asian Survey* 48, no. 3 (May-June 2008): 453-472.

⁴⁹Avery Goldstein, “The Diplomatic Face of China’s Grand Strategy: A Rising Power’s Emerging Choice,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 168 (2001): 836.

than the latter.⁵⁰ Due to China's continued dependence on technology, capital and market access from Western countries such as the US and Japan, China accepts that challenging the US militarily is imprudent. However, while avoiding a conflict with the US as much as possible, China continuously tries to create advantageous conditions for its economic development by maintaining friendly relationships with its neighboring countries such as South Korea and Japan.

China's Korean Peninsula Policy

Traditionally, the Korea Peninsula has been of great interest to China. The territories of interests of the four major powers of the world, the United States, Japan, China, and Russia converge on the Korean Peninsula. It is the border area between socialist countries of North Korea and China, and the democratic countries of South Korea, Japan, and the United States. Regarding China's position, in terms of establishing a stable environment for its continued economic development, the Korean Peninsula poses the dreadful possibility of a military conflict similar to the Taiwan Strait. Moreover, it is the place where North Korea, China's military ally as well as a strategic buffer and negotiating card to prevent the potential containment by the US, and South Korea, one of China's biggest trading partners, coexist.⁵¹ China's Korean Peninsula policy is subordinated within the framework of the two top goals of foreign policy, which is first establishing a favorable environment for continued economic development, and second, countering what it claims to be Western attempts at containing China led by the

⁵⁰Young-Nam Cho, 228-230.

⁵¹Ibid., 253.

US while expanding its international influence.⁵² Within this framework, following its establishment of diplomatic relations with South Korea, China greatly expanded cooperation with South Korea, and, simultaneously, made efforts to maintain its special relationship with North Korea. By executing a policy that seeks peaceful co-existence of the two Koreas, China has been promoting an “~~maxi~~-mini” strategy that maximizes the achievement of national interests while minimizing the cost invested in economic and security issues.⁵³ Main goals of China’s Korean Peninsula policy are: maintaining the North Korean regime; inducing North Korea’s reform; improving its relationship with South Korea; securing a dominant influence on the Korean Peninsula; and inducing a gradual pro-Chinese unification of the Korean Peninsula.⁵⁴

Maintaining the North Korean regime is the first goal of China’s Korean Peninsula policy. If North Korea collapsed, the political, security, economic and social damages to China are expected to be tremendous. From political and security perspectives, North Korea is a strategic buffer protecting China against the influence of presence of the United States. Therefore, the prospect of confronting the US Army along the new border after a North Korean collapse is a disconcerting one for China. Also, as verified by the Six-Party talks, North Korea is an important negotiation card for China to

⁵²Ibid., 257.

⁵³Samuel S. Kim, “The Making of China’s Korea Policy in the Era of Reform,” in *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978-2000*, ed. David M. Lampton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 371-408.

⁵⁴David Shambaugh, “China and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the Long Term,” *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 44-45; Young-Nam Cho, 257-259.

expand its international influence. Especially, the North Korean issue is a central focus for China in dealing with South Korea and the United States.⁵⁵

From the perspective of an economy and society, China expects the economic loss and social confusion resulting from the large number of North Korean DP surge into China as potentially formidable. A typical estimate puts the number of North Korean DP as approximately two million, and most of them are expected to flee into China.⁵⁶ China is concerned about the potential chaos to be caused by the situation including border disintegration, an increase in crime, and the potential identity confusion of ethnic Korean-Chinese after the integration of North Korean DP into Manchuria where more than two million ethnic Korean-Chinese are already living. Chinese concerns that the collapse of North Korea would cause tremendous damage to the political, security, economic and social fabric of China, make maintaining North Korean regime a top priority of China's Korean Peninsula policy.

China's second goal is to induce North Korea to adopt a Chinese style reform. China believes that North Korea can achieve economic and social reforms while avoiding a collapse of its communist system as happened in the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries at the end of the Cold War. China realizes that North Korean reform might be a gamble that worsens the situation in North Korea, which has been under the long dictatorship of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il's family. However, China also believes

⁵⁵Ji You, "China and North Korea: A Fragile Relationship of Strategic Convenience," *Journal of Contemporary China* 10, no. 28 (August 2001): 392-394.

⁵⁶Chosun.com, "Concept plan 5029," 12 October 2010, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/10/12/2010101201642.html (accessed 5 February 2011).

that only through a reform and opening, can the North Korean economy improve, the stability of the regime be maintained, and therefore the current state of the separation of the Korean Peninsula be sustained with stability, if the North Koreans adopt a sustainable political and economic reform.⁵⁷

China's third goal is to continue to expand its relations with South Korea. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and South Korea, their relationship has been growing dramatically based on commerce. China is pursuing an advantageous environment for its economic growth by strengthening its relationship with South Korea. Additionally, in terms of politics and security, by maintaining and developing a close relationship with South Korea, China intends to strengthen its leverage to control North Korea, prevent South Korea from being involved in a possible US-led containment of China, and offset the threat to China's national security from the ROK-US and US-Japan alliances.⁵⁸

Fourth, China wants to confirm its dominant influence on the Korean Peninsula. Regarding the Korean Peninsula as its traditional area of influence, China aims to intensify the interdependency between China and both South and North Korea, so it can exercise crucial influence on the policy establishments in the two Koreas and gain greater influence than other neighboring powers such as the United States, Japan, and Russia. Particularly, China sees its influence on the Korean Peninsula in a relative term vis-à-vis

⁵⁷Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula," 48; Young-Nam Cho, 257.

⁵⁸Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula," 48-50.

the United States. By acting as a strong sponsor of the North Korean regime and strengthening its relationship with South Korea, China is working to achieve this goal.

Finally, China prefers the continuation of the current division of the Korean Peninsula. However, in the long run, if the two Koreas are to be unified, China prefers a pro-Chinese unification, not unification achieved through other foreign intervention by countries such as the United States.⁵⁹ China definitely does not want a rapid unification caused by the sudden collapse of North Korea because China believes that if that happens, an enormous amount of political, economic and social cost would pass to China as previously discussed. China also wants the alliance between South Korea and the US to atrophy after the unification of the Korean Peninsula so that the US forces are withdrawn from the Peninsula.⁶⁰ China believes that if the alliance between South Korea and the US continues even after North Korea disappears because of unification, China would become the new target of the alliance. China is wary of the possibility that a unified Korea might become a forward base of the US to intervene in the Taiwan Strait and promote what China views as a containment policy against China.⁶¹

⁵⁹Gill Bates, *Rising Star: China's New Security Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 147.

⁶⁰In China, there are some opinions that state if the ROK-US alliance is not hostile to China after the unification of the Korean Peninsula, it would not be a problem to China. Jae Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner: Korea-China Relations and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 117-118.

⁶¹China believes the nation established after the unification of the Korean Peninsula would be pro-American and further expects US troop presence on the peninsula will continue even after the unification. Yunling Zhang, *International Environment for China after 10-15 years* (Beijing: China's Social Science Press, 2003), 51-52.

Sino-North Korean Relations

The relationship between China and North Korea, commonly referred to as the “Blood alliance” or “Lips and teeth relationship,” began from the time of the Chinese Civil War in the 1940s. North Korea extensively supported the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the war by providing several rear area bases to the PLA in North Korean territory and having 60,000 North Koreans partake in the war within the PLA. In return, during the Korean War, Mao Zedong decided to participate in the war despite internal objections and 360,000 PLA soldiers, including Mao’s son, were killed or wounded during the Korean War.⁶² In 1961, the “China-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance”⁶³ was signed and an official military alliance was established.

However, relations between North Korea and China became strained during the Cultural Revolution in China. Mao wanted to have the revolution spread to North Korea and his Red Guards criticized Kim Il-sung as a “fat revisionist.” As a reaction to this criticism, North Korea denigrated the Cultural Revolution, calling it “Doctrinarism.” Its relationship with China deteriorated, even resulting in exchanges of gunfire along the border. In the 1980s, while China began its reform and adopted the policy of positioning China’s economic development as its top priority, North Korea refused to adopt the

⁶²Jong-Seok Lee, “Change of China-North Korean Relations and its Implications from the Historical and Structural Perspective,” *Sejong Policy Study* 6, no. 1 (2010): 463-464.

⁶³This treaty defines when one party is attacked from the outside or becomes involved in a war, the other party should provide military support without hesitation. The treaty is valid unless the both parties agree to revise or terminate it.

Chinese style reform and maintained a closed policy, so the uncomfortable relationship between the countries continued. After the establishment of diplomatic relationship between China and South Korea in 1992, the relationship between China and North Korea reached a crucial turning point. The relationship between China and North Korea was no longer an unconditional blood alliance. It became a strategic connection, selectively considering each country's national interests prior to cooperation and support.

Having the intent to promote economic development and counter the ROK-US alliance and the US-Japan alliance, China ameliorated its relationship with South Korea. As a result, the distance between North Korea and China became further apart. To China, North Korea became merely a buffer zone from the United States; a useful negotiation card to be used in diplomacy with the US, South Korea, and Japan; a country in need of continuous economic support; a state that can break the stability of the Korean Peninsula.⁶⁴ After the series of North Korean military provocations in 2010, the torpedo attack on the Cheonan and the artillery attack to Yeonpyeong Island, witnessing China's supportive stand behind North Korea, some raised the concern that the relationship between North Korea and China was still strong enough to form a new Cold War structure confronting the ROK-US alliance. However, it is more persuasive that the purpose of the Chinese stand is not to confront the ROK-US alliance through supporting North Korea. Rather China probably wanted to prevent a potential entrapment into a

⁶⁴Ji You also asserts that the relationship between China and North Korea has few common interests; therefore, their relation is not a real alliance, rather a fragile relationship by strategic convenience. For the political and economic conflicts between China and North Korea, see Ji You: 387-398.

conflict on the Korean Peninsula based on treaty obligations with North Korea, since the military tension in the Korean Peninsula was too heightened at the time.⁶⁵

As for North Korea, China is the passage to communicate with other powerful countries, the only country keeping friendly relationship with the South and the North, a military ally, and a critical supporter to overcome its economic crisis and to maintain its regime. Therefore, China remains a tremendous strategic value-added partner to North Korea.⁶⁶ Unlike China, North Korea, which maintains itself with the idolization of Kim Il-sung's family based on the self-reliance idea called "Juche," refused to adopt reform in fear of the rapid change that would be caused by the transition. However, as the economic situation has continuously worsened, the country has become isolated from the international community. China remains the only country providing support to North Korea, but North Korea is not in a blind love with China. Among the key leaders in North Korea, distrust and annoyance toward China are accumulating in a rapid fashion.⁶⁷ In

⁶⁵China has the dilemma of entrapment from its alliance relations with North Korea and it does not want to be entrapped into a war again as it did during the Korean War. HakKeun Jin, "The Achievements and Limitations of ROK-PRC Military Cooperation: Based on International Cooperation Theory" (Master's thesis, Seoul National University, 2008), 47-55.

⁶⁶Ji You, 387-388.

⁶⁷Kim Jong-il said to Hyun Jung Eun, Chairperson of the Hyundai Corporation that China is an unreliable country. MKnew, "Kim Jong-il doesn't believe China," 3 January 2011, <http://news.mk.co.kr/newsRead.php?sc=30000018&cm=EA%B5%AD%EC%A0%9C%20%EC%A3%BC%EC%9A%94%EA%B8%B0%EC%82%AC&year=2011&no=4598&selfFlag=&relatedcode=&wonNo=&sID=303> (accessed 10 February 2011).

fact, North Korea sometimes uses the US or Russia as bargaining chips to control its interactions with China.⁶⁸

In summary, while China and North Korea began their military alliance relationship as blood sharing partners in the past, their relationship has changed. Now it is one of a strategic cooperation involving selective cooperation and support based on considerations of each country's interests instead of a relationship pursuing unconditional cooperation. However, despite this change, both nations continue to need each other for several reasons. They include North Korea's importance as a strategic buffer for China from and a good negotiation card to check the United States, Japan, and South Korea; the sharing of the same socialist ideology; and China's role as an enormous political and economic supporter to North Korea. Both countries behave like ~~a~~ couple without love but not divorcing," maintaining their relationship and their military alliance even under a certain level of rising discord between the two countries.

Sino-South Korean Relations

In the past, South Korea and China treated each other as enemies. But, after the appearance of Deng Xiaoping and with the economic reform in the 1980s, the economic exchanges between the two countries began to grow. In the early 1990s, bilateral trade increased by the opening of the branch offices of the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) in each country, and agreements for most-favored nation (MFN) status, and the mutual protection

⁶⁸In the early 1980s, when Sino-US relationship improved rapidly, Kim Il-sung made a sudden visit to Soviet Union which maintained hostile relations with China. Chae-Jin Lee, *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations*, 81.

of investments. Finally, following the establishments of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Russia in 1990, worries about its shrinking influence on the Korean Peninsula led China to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1992 despite a strong protest from North Korea.⁶⁹ After the establishment of diplomatic relation, the Sino-South Korean relationship developed dramatically in various areas.⁷⁰ In 2003, the relationship between the two countries improved from a “Good-neighborly relations” to a “Comprehensive Cooperative partnership.” In 2008, it changed again to the current “Strategic and Cooperative partnership” during President Lee Myung-bak’s visit to China.⁷¹

Economic interdependence has been the core driver for the development of the Sino-South Korean relations. When diplomatic relations were established, the trade volume between the two countries was a mere 6.4 billion dollars. However, by 2009 their trade volume increased to 141 billion dollars, a 23-fold increase from 1992, positioning China as the largest trade partner of South Korea, and South Korea became China’s third

⁶⁹Victor D. Cha, “Engaging China: The View from Korea,” in *Engaging China: The Management of Emerging Power*, ed., Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (London: Routledge, 1999), 32-56.

⁷⁰HakKeun Jin, 1-2.

⁷¹China divides its diplomatic relationships into two categories, strategic and non-strategic relationships. Strategic relationship with China means the talks on various issues concerning politics, diplomacy, security, economy, culture at vice minister-level are carried out. Agendas of talks between the two countries include regional issues. Tae Hwan Lee “Strategic and Cooperative Partnership between South Korea and China: Evaluation and Prospect,” *Sejong Policy Study* 6, no. 2 (2010): 128.

largest trade partner following the United States and Japan.⁷² Because of the advanced technology of South Korea, the large market size of China, and geographical-cultural proximity, the economic ties between the two countries continues to grow. If a free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries is concluded, the current level of economic ties between the two countries is expected to grow even stronger.

Exchanges and cooperation in the political and diplomatic realms have expanded greatly as well. Based on a consensus over the “one-China principle” (*yige zhongguo yuanze* – 一个中国原则) and peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula, the bilateral summits have been held nearly annually since the establishment of the diplomatic relations. And, China and South Korea’s mutual relationship driven by their economic interdependence could have resulted in a “Strategic and Cooperative partnership” in the political and diplomatic realms. However, their relationship in the security area, as displayed after North Korea’s attacks on the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong Island, still contains a latent tension under the framework of the ROK-US and China-North Korean alliances. Mostly due to the confrontational characteristic between the two military alliances, the Sino-South Korean military relationship remains at a limited level, such as exchanging visits of personnel, aircraft, and vessels.⁷³

The number of visitors between South Korea and China, which measures the level of social and cultural relations between the two countries, was only 130,000 in 1992.

⁷²Embassy of the Republic of Korea in China, <http://www.koreanembassy.cn/contents/politics/serv2-71-01.aspx?bm=2&sm=3&fm=1> (accessed 6 February 2011).

⁷³HakKeun Jin, 66-71.

However, it grew to more than 4 million, a 35-fold increase, by 2007. In addition, concerning the exchange of international students, the number of South Korean students studying in China was 57,000 in 2007 (35 percent of total international students in China), and the number of Chinese students studying in South Korea increased to 20,000 (62 percent of total international students in South Korea).

The reasons for the rapid development of the Sino-South Korean relationship include China's desire to build a favorable environment for continued economic development while balancing against the United States and Japan, South Korea's desire to take the initiative in the relationship with North Korea, the growing interdependency between the two economies, and the geographical and cultural proximity between the two countries.⁷⁴

However, the Sino-South Korean relationship is not all rosy. Numerous issues continue to exist between the two countries. Some of these issues include China's "Northeast Project" (*dongbei gongcheng*—东北工程),⁷⁵ North Korean DP in China, US forces in South Korea, North Korea's nuclear program, missile defense (MD), different positions on the third generation hereditary succession of the North Korean regime, and a

⁷⁴Tae Hwan Lee, 124; For China's perspective on the development of Sino-South Korean relations after diplomatic establishment, see Derong Xu and Xiang Dongmei, "Background of the Comprehensive Partnership between China and South Korea in Twenty First Century," *Journal of International Economics and Politics*, no. 2 (1999): 43.

⁷⁵This project is conducted by Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) and argues that the ancient Korean kingdoms such as Gojoseon, Goguryeo, and Balhae belong to the Chinese. For the background, political intent, and historical flaws of the project, see Hwy-Tak Yoon, "China's Northeast Project and Korean History," *Korea Journal* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 142-171.

potential collapse of the North Korean regime. In addition, on the unification issue of the Korean Peninsula, South Korea and China show a clear difference. While South Korea ultimately aims at the unification of the Korean Peninsula, China pursues preserving the status quo by maintaining the North Korean regime. For South Korea, between the United States (military ally) and China (the largest market), the possibility of conflicting pressure from the two sides such as the strategic flexibility of the US forces in South Korea and missile defense continues to increase. This situation will work as a great challenge to the Sino-South Korean relationship in the future.⁷⁶

Sino-American Relations

The United States and China fought in the Korean War as enemies in the 1950s and have experienced numerous confrontations over the Taiwan Strait ever since. However, in the 1960s, as China was recognizing the Soviet Union as a military threat, the United States made attempts to improve its relationship with China to check and balance the military threat from the Soviet Union. The two countries established diplomatic relations in 1979, which became strong enough for the US to install a military base in the Xinjiang region in China to collect information on the Soviet Union.⁷⁷ However, this cooperation between the US and China was terminated after the

⁷⁶HakKeun Jin, 66.

⁷⁷Surface combatants exchange, exchange visit of high level military officers were carried out positively between the US and China. In the mid-1980s, the US elevated China's position to quasi-NATO level. Byong-Moo Hwang, "China and Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia," in *Security cooperation in Northeast Asia: Evaluation and Prospect*, ed. Sung Hee Lee (Seoul: Korean National Defense University, 2003), 88-91.

Tiananmen massacre in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Western countries, led by the United States, strongly criticized China and imposed sanctions on it for the bloody suppression of the students in Tiananmen square. Moreover, because of the collapse of their common enemy, the Soviet Union, the cooperation between the two countries lost its purpose.

After the end of the Cold War, China, regarding its diplomatic relationship with the United States as the most important, was searching for ways to develop its economy within the US-led international system and to improve its standing in the global society. During this period, China's entrance into the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and the comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT) was a way for China to improve its strategic relationship with the United States. On the other hand, beginning in the early 1990s, the US, lacking a consensus on China policy derived from a disagreement between the global-minded business interests and human rights and religious groups, the US carried out a fragmented approach towards China, to accelerate its integration into the system of international institutions, norm, and regimes.⁷⁸ As years went by, as a result of its rapid economic growth, China became the newest power in the international system, replacing the previous position of the Soviet Union. Then, as a result of deepening mutual economic dependency, the North Korea's nuclear issue, and the war on terrorism led by the US, both countries began to cooperate even while competing. With China's dramatic rise, the two countries' areas of interest, cooperation, competition, and conflict covered

⁷⁸Steven I. Levin, —Sino-American Relations: Practicing Damage Control,” in *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium*, ed. Samuel S. Kim (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 96-97.

not only issues between the two countries such as the trade imbalance and currency appreciation of the *yuan*, but also global issues like North Korea's nuclear program, Iran, Sudan, the war on terrorism, human rights, energy, and the environment.⁷⁹

The cooperative as well as conflicting relationship between the US and China becomes quite acute when it comes to security issues in Northeast Asia. First, the strategic goal of the United States is to maintain a strong position in order to secure the stability of the Northeast Asia.⁸⁰ Through strengthening of the missile defense system, improving Taiwan's defense capabilities, trying to prevent North Korea's nuclear armament, and reinforcing the ROK-US alliance and the US-Japan alliance, the United States is interfering with China's goals and hampering China's rise. China accepts the fact that challenging the US politically, economically, and militarily is unrealistic and very dangerous.⁸¹ By blocking Taiwan's independence, maintaining the dominant position on the North Korean issue, and counterbalancing the ROK-US alliance and the

⁷⁹DongA.com, "Trends of the US-China relations," 17 September 2009, <http://www.donga.com/fbin/output?n=200909170076> (accessed 7 February 2011); For the cooperative as well as conflicting relations between the United States and China, see David Shambaugh, "Patterns of Interaction in Sino-American Relations," in *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, ed., Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 197-223; Steven I. Levin (1988), 91-113.

⁸⁰Young-Nam Cho, 237.

⁸¹China's US policy has been defensive and responsive. China has avoided direct and serious confrontation with the United States. If necessary, even with some burden, China tried to compromise with the United States. Young-Nam Cho, 239; Steven I. Levin (1998), 96-97.

US-Japan alliance, China has been searching for a way to improve its position in Northeast Asia while countering possible containment of China led by the US.⁸²

The United States and China have been simultaneously and alternatively cooperative and conflicting in their relations after the Cold War while refraining from a full confrontation. The US wants to reduce its trade deficit with China, and monitor China's rise, so it remains the only superpower in the international system. On the other hand, China wants to maximize its economic interest from the trade with the United States and expand its international influence in politics, economy, and military while avoiding a direct conflict with the United States. Therefore, it is likely that these two superpowers will continue to cooperate with each other while maintaining a certain level of conflict and competition between them.

Sudden Change in North Korea and China's National Interests

If a sudden change in North Korea occurs, how will that influence China's national interests?⁸³ First, a sudden change in North Korea will negatively impact China's economic development, the most critical national interest of China. Continuous economic development and improvement of the people's quality of life have been the top goals of the Chinese government since the 1980s because economic development not only solves

⁸²For the agreements and disagreements between the United States and China on military and security issues in Northeast Asia, see David Shambaugh, "Sino-American Relations since September 11: Can the New Stability Last?," in *Chinese Foreign Policy in Transition*, ed. Guoli Liu (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 205-208.

⁸³For the impact of a North Korean collapse on China's national interests, see also Changhee Park, 41-43.

the problems of daily life, but also directly improves China's position in international society.⁸⁴ Even though the trade volume between North Korea and China is very small, a collapse of North Korea would greatly affect the economic relationship between South Korea and China. The three provinces of Northeast of China such as Jilin, Heilongjiang, and Liaoning, whose economies have grown rapidly because of their close relationship with the two Koreas, will be economically damaged as well. Additionally, it is expected that a potential military conflict with either the United States and/or South Korea or with another neighboring country caused by a North Korean collapse could hinder the productions of Chinese industries, capital liquidity, and foreign investment, and become the major obstacle against China's economic development.⁸⁵

A second major problem would be DP from North Korea flowing into China and the serious social disruptions that might result. China already experienced serious social disruptions caused by North Korean DP in the 1990s and Burmese DP entering to Yunnan Province in 2009. Therefore, China rightly worries about having a large number of North Korean DP flowing simultaneously into the three provinces in Northeast of China if a sudden change in North Korea occurs. China is concerned about an increase in crime, a collapse of the border security between China and North Korea, difficulty in controlling the Korean-Chinese minority, and the tremendous economic burden of manage the DP.

⁸⁴Young-Nam Cho, 194, 228.

⁸⁵Bonnie S. Glaser and Scott Snyder, "Responding to Change on the Korean Peninsula: Impediments to U.S.-South Korea-China Coordination," *A Report of the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (May 2010), 4.

A third concern is that a collapse of North Korea may trigger a military conflict between China and the United States, or between the ROK-US alliance and the China-North Korea alliance on the Korean Peninsula. The US basically has the will to dispatch its forces to secure the safety of nuclear weapons and other WMD in case of a sudden change in North Korea. South Korea regards the potential collapse of North Korea as the opportunity for the unification of the Korean Peninsula. The United States and South Korea have developed a “CONPLAN 5029” to respond to this contingency of the North Korean collapse. Therefore, in the case of a North Korean collapse, South Korea and the US are very likely to dispatch their armed forces to North Korea to secure WMD, conduct stability operations, and unify the Peninsula. In this situation, if China, according to its military alliance treaty with the North, intervenes militarily in the Korean Peninsula, it might become involved in a war again as it was during the Korean War. Particularly, for China which experienced huge casualties from the Korean War and lost the opportunity for the unification with Taiwan and representation in the UN, engaging in a ground war once again against the ROK-US combined forces would have extremely negative effect on its national interests, not only in politically and diplomatically, but also in the economic realm.⁸⁶

Another negative impact could come from the proliferation of North Korea’s WMD, including nuclear weapons, biological and chemical weapons, and long-range missiles. Like the United States, China is concerned about the proliferation of WMD and related technologies from North Korea. In particular, if WMD or their related

⁸⁶For the impact of China’s participation in the Korean War on its national interests, see Chae-Jin Lee, *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations*, 57-58.

technologies were obtained by some separatist factions in China, it would accelerate serious national chaos.⁸⁷

A fifth negative effect would be that China would lose its strategic buffer protecting itself from the US and the Western countries as well as a useful negotiating card. China basically believes that the United States has been conducting a containment policy against China since the early 1990s based on its military support of Taiwan, reinforcement of its military relations with neighboring countries around China, relocation of US forces, strengthening of theater missile defense (TMD), and its raising the China threat theory.⁸⁸ Therefore, countering potential containment from the Western countries led by the US is one of the highest diplomatic goals of China. North Korea also plays an important role in pursuing this goal. The fact that China is seen by the international community as essential for resolving every North Korean provocation, and that China has been utilizing the North Korean issues to check the United States, South Korea, and Japan shows the strategic value of North Korea to China.

Finally, a collapse of the neighboring socialist ally may spread the perception that ~~the~~ socialist system has failed.”⁸⁹ If this perception were to spread in China where freedom and human rights have been limited to certain levels, demands for democracy, freedom, and human rights as well as an anti-regime movement might arise.

⁸⁷Changhee Park, 41.

⁸⁸Young-Nam Cho, 235.

⁸⁹Chae-Jin Lee, *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations*, 172-173.

The Possibility of Chinese Military Intervention on the Korean Peninsula

So far, China's external environment and national interests that affect China's decision on its military intervention on the Korean Peninsula at the national strategic level have been studied. At this point, based on the result of the study, an assessment of whether or not China would intervene militarily if a North Korean collapse occurs, will be made. This assessment will be based on an examination of the advantages and disadvantages to China of an intervention. These advantages and disadvantages will vary according to the cause of the North Korean collapse. The greatest difference will be between the effects of a collapse due to internal conflicts and the effects of a collapse caused by a clash with outside forces. China's likely responses to a collapse arising from either of these two causes are analyzed below.

Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages of China's military intervention in case of an internal conflict-driven collapse

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Flexibility to select the types of intervention and room to reduce expected risk and disadvantages- Maintenance of a pro-China North Korean regime- Security of WMD in North Korea- Prevention of North Korean DP emigration- Border control- Fulfillment of military alliance treaty obligation with North Korea | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Possible military conflict with the ROK and the US- Potential loss of dominant influence on North Korea- Potential security vulnerability to independence movement in Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang during the military intervention in the Korean Peninsula- Economic burden |

Source: Created by author.

Table 1 presents the advantages and disadvantages to China of intervening militarily in North Korea in case of a collapse that occurs due to an internal conflict such as a power struggle, a military coup d'état, a civil war, or a popular uprising. Given the importance and immediacy of the situation arising from such a development, it seems likely that China's military would attempt to intervene rapidly. Keeping the North Korean regime as a strategic buffer zone and a useful negotiation card is very important to China's national interests. The securing of North Korean WMD such as nuclear weapons and biological-chemical weapons, the prevention of large influx of DP, and border control directly affect China's national interests. Even though the relations between the two countries have become an "alliance without love," China has a legal basis to intervene militarily because of their alliance treaty. In addition, if a North Korean collapse is caused by any form of internal conflict, there is a strong possibility that the both incumbent faction and the challenging faction would request the support of China. Therefore, China would likely desire to intervene as soon as possible to take the initiative before the armed forces of South Korea and the United States intervene, and try to rebuild a pro-China regime in North Korea. Undoubtedly, there also exist some risks and disadvantages. Given the fact that the ROK or the ROK-US combined forces are also likely to intervene, the possibility of a Chinese military conflict with these forces would be high. At the same time, independence movements in Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang may take advantage of this opportunity while China's PLA conducts military operations on the Korean Peninsula. The economic burden to conduct a large-scale military campaign would be considerable as well. If the campaign ended up as a failure, the loss of China's national reputation would be enormous. However, if a North Korean collapse is caused

by internal conflicts, China has some flexibility to select either a single and unilateral intervention blocking South Korean and the US military intervention, a multinational operation in cooperation with South Korea, the United States, and related countries, or an UN-led PKO. In other words, in this situation China would have some room to reduce expected risk and disadvantages.

Table 2. Advantages and disadvantages of China's military intervention: in case of a collapse due to external factors

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintenance of a pro-China North Korean regime and dominant influence on North Korea (in case of successful interdiction of the ROK and US military intervention) - Security of WMD in North Korea - Prevention of North Korean DP emigration - Border control - Fulfillment of military alliance treaty obligation with North Korea | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct military conflict with the ROK and the US is unavoidable (huge casualties, political and economic damage) - Serious influence on economic development - Deterioration of its relationship with the ROK and the US - Criticism from international society and damage on national image - Dissemination of the China threat perception - Increased security vulnerability to independence movement in Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang during the military intervention |

Source: Created by author.

On the other hand, if the North Korean collapse is caused by an external factor such as a military conflict between the two Koreas or a US military operation against North Korea, the list of advantages looks very different. This is shown in table 2. Given

this kind of cause for a North Korean collapse, the possibility or probability of a Chinese military intervention would be low despite its military alliance with North Korea. The reasons are as follows. The characteristic of a sudden change caused by external factors is that the conflict between the US forces or the ROK-US combined forces and North Korean military will have already occurred. Therefore, if China's military does decide to intervene, another military conflict between the PLA and the ROK-US combined forces is unavoidable. As explained earlier, the two ultimate goals of China's foreign policy are to secure an advantageous environment for continued economic development while countering the potential effort led by the US, containing China. Additionally, if the notion that challenging the United States militarily is reckless is accepted, China will give economic development a higher priority than directly opposing containment. China's Korean Peninsula policy is decided within the framework of China's two most important diplomatic goals, which places it at the national security strategy level. Even though maintaining the North Korean regime is the highest goal of the Korean Peninsula policy, this is only a theater strategy level matter and is therefore subordinate to national security strategy decisions. It is much more important to China to avoid direct military conflict with the United States in order to maintain an advantageous environment for economic development. China experienced enormous damages from fighting against the US during the Korean War and lost the opportunity to conquer Taiwan. Therefore, if it conducts another war against the US or ROK-US combined forces, the damage to China's national interests is estimated to be more severe than in the past. Furthermore, if the independence movements in Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang take advantage of the situation, Chinese territorial integrity, which is a critical national interests of China, will be threatened.

To sum up, if a sudden change in North Korea occurs due to external causes and if China does decide to intervene, unlike in a domestically-driven collapse, China will not be able to avoid a military conflict with the ROK-US combined forces. Thus, rather than conduct a war against South Korea and the United States for the partner of an unraveling alliance, China's military response would likely be limited to preventing the influx of DP and WMD proliferation from North Korea, and controlling the borderlines. At the same time, China would focus its diplomatic power to have the government of a unified Korea promote a pro-China policy, or at least no anti-China policy, and not allow US forces be stationed above the 38th parallel.

Summary

This chapter has examined how a North Korean collapse would effect China's external environment and national interests and the possibility of China intervening militarily in the Korean Peninsula. By examining and comparing China's foreign policy, Korean Peninsula policy, Sino-North Korean relations, Sino-South Korean relations, and Sino-American relations, it defined China's external environment and from what perspective China perceives the external environment. Continued economic development is the most important goal of China and for this goal, establishing an advantageous external environment and expanding its international influence while preventing potential Western efforts at containing China led by the US, are top objectives of Chinese foreign policy. Under these goals, China's Korean Peninsula policy basically aims to maintain the stability of the North Korean regime. However, just because the maintenance of the North Korean regime is the most important goal of China's Korean Peninsula policy does not mean that the relationship between the two countries is as good as it was in the past.

Even though China maintains its military alliance with North Korea and shares its socialist ideals with North Korea, their relationship has devolved into an ordinary relationship of selective cooperation and support based on China's own national interests. China, in particular, does not want to be entrapped again in the Korean Peninsula because of its military treaty obligations with North Korea. Sino-South Korean relations, after the establishment of diplomatic relationship in 1992, have improved dramatically and their relations have developed to the level of a strategic and cooperative partnership. However, between the two countries, potential conflicts such as persistent historical issues, the US forces in South Korea, missile defense system, and North Korean issues, i.e., the nuclear program, dictatorship, potential collapse, and unification, still exist. The United States and China, as the superpowers in the international society, selectively cooperate or compete over the spectrum of global issues such as the war on terrorism, the North Korean nuclear program, Iran, Sudan, the environment, and human rights. However, China still seems to basically accept the powerful position of the United States and recognizes the reality that challenging the US at present will be self defeating.

Secondly, in terms of China's national interests, if a sudden change occurs in North Korea, it might influence negatively China's economic development and cause social upheaval because of a large number of North Korean DP. China may lose its strategic buffer and a useful negotiation card. In addition, because of the military alliance with North Korea, China might be entrapped into another war on the Korean Peninsula. Unsecured North Korean WMD may end up in the hands of the separatists in China and a collapse of a neighboring socialist country may cause serious social unrest in China.

Considering China's external environment and its national interests, China will focus their best efforts to prevent a collapse through multi-dimensional support to North Korea.

However, if sudden change becomes a reality, China's military intervention will be decided depending on the cause and the scenario of the incident. As the analysis illustrated in table 1 indicates, if the collapse is due to an internal conflict such as a power struggle, a military coup, or a popular uprising, it is likely that China's military would attempt to intervene rapidly to secure WMD, block North Korean DP, and control the border. However, China will carefully consider the way its military intervenes. It could be a single and unilateral intervention that blocks military interventions by the ROK and the US, a multinational operation in coordination with neighboring and interested countries including the ROK and the US, or a PKO under the command of the UN.

On the other hand, if a sudden change in North Korea is caused by external factors, such as a military conflict between the two Koreas or US military operations against North Korea, it would be unavoidable for China's military to collide with the ROK-US combined forces if it does intervene. However, as pointed out above, China, even though North Korea is an allied socialist country as well as its strategic buffer, would try to avoid a military conflict with the United States in view of its more critical national interests, such as its continued economic development, its relationship with the United States, China's position in the international society, and the potential independence movement of Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang. Therefore, if the North Korean collapse is caused by external factors, despite the military alliance relations with the North, the role of the PLA will be limited to preventing the influx of WMD and DP from North Korea, and controlling the border.

CHAPTER 6

POSSIBLE FORMS FOR A PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY INTERVENTION ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

In the previous chapter, it was explained why the PLA would probably intervene in the Korean Peninsula if a North Korean collapse was caused by internal factors and why it probably would not intervene if the North Korean regime collapsed after a military confrontation with South Korea and the United States. In this chapter, using Lykke's model for military strategy, three potential types of intervention are examined. These are single and unilateral intervention, multinational operations, and UN-led PKO. They are then compared and assessed in order to identify the most likely type of intervention.

Analysis of Each Type of Military Intervention

Single and Unilateral Intervention

In the event of a sudden change in North Korea, a single and unilateral intervention by the PLA might be, if successfully carried-out, the most favorable intervention. China could maintain its influence on the Korean Peninsula as well as preserving North Korea as its strategic buffer against the US, South Korea, and Japan.

Table 3. Ends, ways, means, and risks of the single and unilateral intervention

| | |
|-------|--|
| Ends | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stabilize North Korea - Rebuild a pro-China North Korean regime - Prevent instability in China |
| Ways | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preclude the introduction of the ROK or ROK-US combined forces - Prevent North Korean DP emigration - Secure WMD - Control border - Conduct stability operations - Gain support from leadership of North Korean communist party, KPA, and local population |
| Means | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shenyang Military Region (MR) including 39 Group Army (GA) - Jinan MR - A large number of units from Guangzhou, Nanjing, and Beijing MRs including 15 and 38 GAs are also required - Units from the People's Armed Police (PAP) - Supporting units from Air Force and Navy |
| Risks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possibility of military conflict with the ROK or ROK-US combined forces and potential escalation of war - Large units and huge military capabilities needed in defeating ROK-US forces and stabilizing North Korea - Vulnerable to independence movement in Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang during the war - North Korean people's potential resistance against the PLA - Limited experience in single stability operations abroad |

Source: Created by author.

In case of single and unilateral intervention in North Korea, PLA's strategic objectives (ends) are the stability of North Korea and the rebuilding of a pro-China regime while preventing potential instability of China. To achieve these objectives

through single and unilateral intervention, there are too many tasks (ways) for the PLA to conduct. First, China has to man its more than 1,400 kilometer long borderline to block North Korean DP and WMD. Second, the PLA must secure all North Korean WMD and related facilities in North Korea. Third, the PLA has to preclude the introduction of the ROK or ROK-US combined forces. Lastly, in order to conduct stability operations successfully, the PLA has to get support from the former North Korean leadership, leaders of the KPA as well as the support from the North Korean population.



Figure 4. Disposition of the People's Liberation Army Ground Forces
Source: U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 61.

In order to conduct these tasks through single and unilateral intervention, substantial capabilities (means) are required for the PLA. First, it would require a huge scale of military capabilities to control the long borderline, and secure WMD and the related facilities spread in the extensive areas in North Korea.⁹⁰ In addition, the PLA requires additional military capabilities to be prepared to either interdict or defeat the intervention of the ROK or ROK-US combined forces. Moreover, the PLA would require a tremendous number of soldiers for the stability operation in North Korea. Because it is highly likely that North Korean people, while in favor of a South Korean-led unification of the Peninsula, would strongly resist the armed forces from China which has been supportive of Kim's regime and which pursues the restoration of the pro-China North Korean regime.⁹¹ In general, it is known that at least 20 soldiers per 1,000 local residents are required to conduct stability operations under a hostile environment. Considering that North Korea has 23 million people, it is not unreasonable to assume that around 460,000 soldiers, which is about one-third of the PLA ground forces or the number of soldiers of Shenyang and Jinan MRs combined, would be required for a stability operation. This means, accounting for the rotation of forces, a prolonged stability operation in North

⁹⁰North Korea has placed nuclear weapons, long-range missiles, and more than 2,500-5,000 tons of chemical and biological weapons in different areas of North Korea. Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Korea, *Defense White Paper 2010* (Seoul: Government Printing Office, 2010), 27-28.

⁹¹As of 2010, the number of people who escaped North Korea and came into South Korea reached 20,000. They have strong anti-sentiment against the North Korean regime and strongly criticize China's support to North Korea. They lead the anti-Kim family movement in South Korea.

Korea would require a maximum of one million soldiers.⁹² Therefore, military capabilities required for a single and unilateral intervention would be the Shenyang MR including 39 GA (RRU),⁹³ Jinan MR, a large number of units from Guanzhou, Nanjing, and Beijing MRs including 15 and 38 GAs (RRU), units from the PAP,⁹⁴ and some supporting units from Air Force and Navy.

However, the risks of a single and unilateral intervention by the PLA are excessively high. During this process, the possibility of a head-to-head conflict with the ROK-US combined forces is very high with a great potential for escalation into a total war. Also, the combat power of the ROK or ROK-US combined forces is enormous in comparison. Therefore, in case of the direct confrontation with the ROK or ROK-US combined forces, the damage of the PLA will become tremendously high without any guarantee on the success of the military campaign. Moreover, even if the PLA successfully interdicts the intervention of the ROK or ROK-US combined forces, a considerable amount of risks lie during the stability operation. First, China has a limited experience in stability operations abroad. After the earthquake in Sichuan province in

⁹²Paul B. Stares and Joel S. Wit, "Preparing for the Sudden Change in North Korea," 21-22; Changhee Park, 47-48.

⁹³Rapid Reaction Unit (RRU) is trained to be capable of being deployed anywhere in China within 24 hours. Paul H. B. Godwin, "From Continent to Periphery: PLA Doctrine, Strategy and Capabilities Towards 2000," *The China Quarterly*, no. 146 (June 1996): 469, 482.

⁹⁴The People's Armed Police (PAP) is a paramilitary organization. The primary mission of the PAP is internal security and the secondary mission is to help the PLA in local defense against external enemies. By law and in practice, the PAP is not part of the PLA. Dennis J. Blasko, "Chinese Army Modernization: An Overview," *Military Review* (September-October 2005): 69.

2008, China conducted a large-scale stability operation in the region. However, conducting such an operation outside of China is an entirely different matter. Compared with domestic operations, an overseas stability operation has various difficulties such as long distance transportation, extended lines of communications, rotation of forces, cultural differences, and potential resistance from the local population.

In addition, if there are attempts for independence in Taiwan, Tibet or Xinjiang during the operations in the Korean Peninsula, China would be very vulnerable to these movements. Since China shares its borders with 14 countries along its 22,000 kilometer long national boundary, and has some separatist movement inside the country pursuing independence, focusing its armed forces in any single region could potentially expose the rest of the country to potential instability. The fact that China could deploy only a limited amount of forces during the 1979 war against Vietnam illustrates this limitation.⁹⁵ Therefore, in reality, China would seem to be able to deploy only limited military capabilities to the Korean Peninsula in the event of a North Korean collapse.⁹⁶

⁹⁵For the reasons why China limited its military action against Vietnam, see Xiaoming Zhang, "China's 1979 War with Vietnam: A Reassessment," *the China Quarterly*, no. 184 (December 2005): 857-860.

⁹⁶Considering China's military strategy and the fact that Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, and South China Sea are critical national interests of China, it is unlikely that China would deploy the main efforts of the Guangzhou, Nanjing, Jinan, Chengdu, and Lanzhou MRs to the Korean Peninsula in case of a North Korean collapse. The PAP would reinforce its internal security missions around the Chinese-North Korean border. Michael Lee (an international military student from Taiwan), interviewed by author, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 10 May 2011.

Multinational Operations

Just as the United States conducted its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan through multinational operations, China's PLA may attempt to intervene in North Korea with the formation of MNF under the approval of the UN. Multinational operations are normally conducted through military alliances or coalitions formed by a lead nation.⁹⁷ Through cooperation within the coalition, the justification and legitimacy of the military operations is recognized by the international community while the risks are shared by all members of the coalition.

If China decided to intervene through multinational operations, the objectives of the PLA (ends) would include stability of North Korea, rebuilding a pro-China North Korean regime while preventing potential instability of China. In addition, China would try to maintain its vested interests in North Korea. The tasks (ways) to achieve these objectives also include the blocking of North Korean DP and WMD, securing WMD and related facilities in North Korea, border control, stability operations, and gaining support from the former leaderships of the regime, leaders of the KPA, and local populations in North Korea. The tasks are as varied as the single and unilateral intervention. However, in this case, China would have to try to project a significant influence on the military operations relative to the ROK or US forces to maintain its vested interests in the region.

⁹⁷Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-16, *Multinational Operations* (2007), i-1-14.

Table 4. Ends, ways, means, and risks of the multinational operations

| | |
|-------|---|
| Ends | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stabilize North Korea - Rebuild a pro-China North Korean regime - Assume lead nation role and play a dominant role within MNF - Prevent instability in China |
| Ways | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lead MNF and closely cooperate with coalitions while limiting the ROK and US role within MNF - Prevent North Korean DP emigration - Secure WMD - Control border - Conduct stability operations - Gain support from leadership of North Korean communist party, KPA, and local population |
| Means | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PLA MNF - Shenyang MR - Units from the PAP - Supporting units from Air Force and Navy |
| Risks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delay of UN sanction and MNF formation - Competition with the ROK (supported by the US) or US to become a lead nation and high likelihood of a ROK or US-led multinational operation (PLA led by the ROK or US forces) - Even if PLA does assume the role of lead nation, limited experience in multinational operations and overseas stability operations hamper command and control - National burden when the stability operations fails or extends over a long period of time - Potential resistance of North Korean population against PLA MNF - Less burden and risks in keeping stability of China compared to the single and unilateral intervention |

Source: Created by author.

The military capabilities (means) required for a multinational operation would be less than those needed for a single and unilateral operations. In this case, China can share tasks within the coalition, but China still would need to deploy additional forces along the borderline to block the North Korean DP and WMD. Therefore, the units required by China would be the PLA MNF, Shenyang MR, some units from the PAP, and some supporting units from the PLA Air Force and Navy.⁹⁸

However, multinational intervention also has many inherent risks. China's role within the coalition would be fraught with significant risks. First, UN sanctions as well as the process to form the MNF could be delayed. If delayed, China may miss the right window to secure the North Korean WMD and block the DP. Next, the possibility that the United States would allow China to assume a leading role in MNF is very low. If the MNF is not under PLA command, rebuilding a pro-China North Korean regime will be unlikely. Third, even if China became the lead nation, high risks would still exist. China's PLA has limited experience in overseas stability operations and multinational operations. In this situation, leading the MNF would become a political and an economic burden if the operations extended beyond the short term or the operation itself failed. In addition, it is highly likely that the local population in North Korea would resist a PLA-led MNF and in that case, China's reputation as the lead nation would be damaged and the objectives of the military intervention would become unattainable. On the other hand, compared to the

⁹⁸In the beginning, the PLA Navy and Air Force will transport the ground forces to the Chinese-North Korean border to prevent emigration of the North Korean DP and block the potential influx of WMD into China. Later, the PLA Navy and Air Force will focus on sustainment operations. The PAP would reinforce its internal security missions around the Chinese-North Korean border. Lee, interview.

single and unilateral intervention, a multinational operation decreases the vulnerability in homeland stability due to the reduced military requirements, in both cost and numbers.

UN-led Peacekeeping Operations

Just as it is a contributing member of the 31-nation PKF in Lebanon, China's PLA may respond to a North Korean collapse as a member of a PKF under the mandate of a UN Security Council resolution.

If China intervenes through UN-led PKO, the objectives of the PLA (ends) would still include the stability of North Korea, rebuilding a pro-China North Korean regime while preventing potential instability of China. Additionally, China would seek a dominant role within the PKF in order to try to maintain its vested interests in North Korea.

The tasks (ways) to achieve these objectives also include blocking North Korean DP and WMD, securing WMD and related facilities in North Korea, border control, stability operations, and gaining support from the former leaderships of the regime, leaders of the KPA, and local populations in North Korea. The tasks are similar to those in a multinational intervention. However, even though China's PKF would hold a parallel relationship with other PKF, it can be assumed that China would try to assert a domineering influence on the military operations by utilizing its position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to maintain its vested interests in North Korea.

Table 5. Ends, ways, means, and risks of the UN-led peacekeeping operations

| | |
|-------|---|
| Ends | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stabilize North Korea - Rebuild a pro-China North Korean regime - Attain dominant role in PKF - Prevent instability in China |
| Ways | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of pro-China PKF leadership and close cooperation within PKF while restraining the ROK and US roles in PKF - Prevent North Korean DP emigration - Secure WMD - Control border - Conduct Stability operations - Gain support from leadership of the North Korean communist party, KPA, and local population |
| Means | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PLA PKF - Shenyang MR - Units from the PAP - Some supporting units from Air Force and Navy |
| Risks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delay of UN sanction and PKF formation - Competition with the ROK or US forces to take initiative within PKF (advantageous position as a permanent member of the UN security council) - Less vested interest in North Korea compared to other types of intervention - PLA experienced in PKO - North Korean people's potential resistance against PLA PKF - Less burden and risks in keeping stability of China compared to the single and unilateral intervention |

Source: Created by author.

Like multinational operations, the required military capabilities (means) for PKO are less compared to single and unilateral operations. China could share all of the tasks within the coalition, but China would need to deploy additional forces along the borderline to block the North Korean DP and WMD. Therefore, the units required for

China would be the PLA PKF, Shenyang MR, some units from the PAP, and some supporting units from the PLA Air Force and Navy.

An intervention through a UN-led PKO also has some risks. First, sanctions from the UN Security Council and the process to form the PKF could be delayed. In this case, China may miss the right chance to secure the North Korean WMD and block the DP. Second, even though China would ostensibly participate in a PKO on the Korean Peninsula as an equal partner with other countries, China would undoubtedly try to lead the operation. Due to expected objections to this from the ROK, the US, and other countries, it is likely that the PKF would not be led by China or pro-China country. Third, there is a high possibility of selective resistance by North Korean people against PLA PKF, which would be trying to build a North Korean regime with close ties to China. In that case, China's role and the vested interests would be seriously damaged.

However, the intervention through the UN-led PKO has less risk than other types of military intervention. First, in comparison with a multinational operation, China has a relatively advantageous position as the permanent member of the UN Security Council. In addition, unlike the multinational operations, through its position in the UN Security Council, China could check and balance the influence of the United States diplomatically without any military friction. Second, China has various experiences in PKO.⁹⁹ Third, compared with the single and unilateral intervention, PKO decreases the vulnerability in homeland stability due to a reduced military requirement for the operations.

⁹⁹As of November 2008, China had deployed 1,900 soldiers as a member of UN-led peacekeeping forces in 25 different areas such as Liberia, Sudan, and Lebanon. Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in 2008* (Beijing: Government Printing Office, 2009), 100-101.

China's Selection

Tables 3, 4, and 5 presented synopses of the ends, ways, means, and risks associated with each of the three possible types of Chinese intervention in North Korea examined in this study. Table 6 below contains a summary comparison of the pluses and minuses of each option. It is possible that a similar comparative display would be used by Chinese political and military leaders as they weighed different causes of action. Their analytical process might also replicate the following analysis.

Table 6. Comparison of three types of military intervention

| | Single and unilateral | Multinational operations | UN-led PKO |
|-------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Ends | unachievable | unachievable | partially achievable |
| Ways | too broad | moderate | moderate |
| Means | over extended | adequate | adequate |
| Risks | high | high | moderate |

Source: Created by author.

First, if the PLA intervenes through single and unilateral operations, the tasks (ways) that would need to be conducted in order to accomplish the objectives of the intervention are too broad and numerous. There would have to be an interdiction of the ROK or ROK-US combined forces, securing of WMD that are spread widely across North Korea, a 1,400 kilometer long border to control, and stability operations dealing with 23 million people in a hostile environment. However, due to the deployment of forces for potential military operations against Taiwan, China's military capabilities (means) required for the Korean Peninsula are over extended. This not only means that a

serious imbalance among ends, ways, and means exists, it also means that the risks are high. This would seem to make it very doubtful that China would choose to carry out a single and unilateral intervention.

Next, an intervention through a multinational approach would result in a sharing of the various tasks (ways) to be conducted in North Korea. Because this approach would avoid a military conflict with the ROK or the ROK-US combined forces, the military capabilities (means) that would be required would be much less and the risks would decrease greatly compared to those in a single and unilateral intervention. However, considering the realistic characteristics of the international system, it can be assumed that the United States would ensure that China did not become the lead nation of the MNF, and it is possible that the PLA might be commanded by a commander from a country that was not supportive of China's goals in North Korea. As a result, China would lose its vested interests in North Korea. Therefore, even though the PLA might, because of the multinational operation, reduce its required ways and means for the operations in North Korea and maintain its military capabilities to counter any independence movement by Taiwan as well as border control between China and North Korea, China's military has the risk of being subordinate to a military it does not feel close to. Even if the PLA did, against all odds, become the lead force of the MNF, risks are still high because of China's limited experience in multinational operations and overseas stability operations as well as the potential resistance of the North Korean population to the PLA. Thus, it is likely that China would avoid the multinational framework.

As for the option of intervening through PKO under the mandate of a UN Security Council resolution, like the multinational operations, this would be a way to share the

various tasks (ways) to be conducted in North Korea. By avoiding military conflict with the ROK or ROK-US combined forces, the required military capabilities (means) and risks decrease. In addition, unlike multinational operations, China has been regularly participating in PKO and as one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, China could seek, through diplomatic efforts, to take the lead. Even though there is risk associated with areas such as possible delays in passing UN resolutions and forming PKF as well as the potential resistance of the North Korean population selectively against the PLA, intervention through PKO seems to keep ends, ways, means relatively balanced with lower risks. On this basis it would seem that UN-led PKO would be the favored intervention type for China.

In summary, China will make its full effort through multi-dimensional support to North Korea to prevent a collapse of the regime. However, in case it occurs, China's preference for military intervention in the Korean Peninsula would be first, a UN-led PKO. The next choice would be multinational operations, and the least preferred course of action would be single and unilateral intervention.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine how a sudden change in North Korea might happen, discuss whether China's PLA would intervene in North Korea, and postulate how the PLA would intervene if the Chinese government decided to become involved militarily on the Korean Peninsula. This chapter concludes the study, and provides policy recommendations.

Conclusions

Regarding the first research question on the potential scenarios of a North Korean collapse, many opinions, without much difference, were presented. They included a power struggle after Kim Jong-il's death, a military coup d'état, civil war, a large-scale natural disaster, a mass exodus of North Korean civilians, a military conflict between the two Koreas, US military operations against North Korean nuclear facilities, and China's military occupation of North Korea. In particular, most studies point to Kim Jong-il's death as the critical cause of a North Korean collapse. This thesis, based on previous studies, divided the scenarios for a sudden change in North Korea into two different categories, an internal conflict-driven collapse and collapse due to external factors. Because of the military alliance between China and North Korea, a Chinese military intervention in North Korea would be strongly influenced by the scenario of the collapse, i.e., whether the collapse is caused by internal conflict or conflict with the outside. This study presented a power struggle, a military coup d'état or civil war, and a popular uprising as the likely scenarios of internal conflict-driven collapse. Concerning the

external factor-driven collapse, this study proposed a military conflict between the two Koreas caused by North Korean provocations and US military operations against North Korea as the most likely scenarios.

On the second research question, based on China's external environment and national interests regarding a North Korean collapse, this study examined the possibility of China's military intervention on the Korean Peninsula.

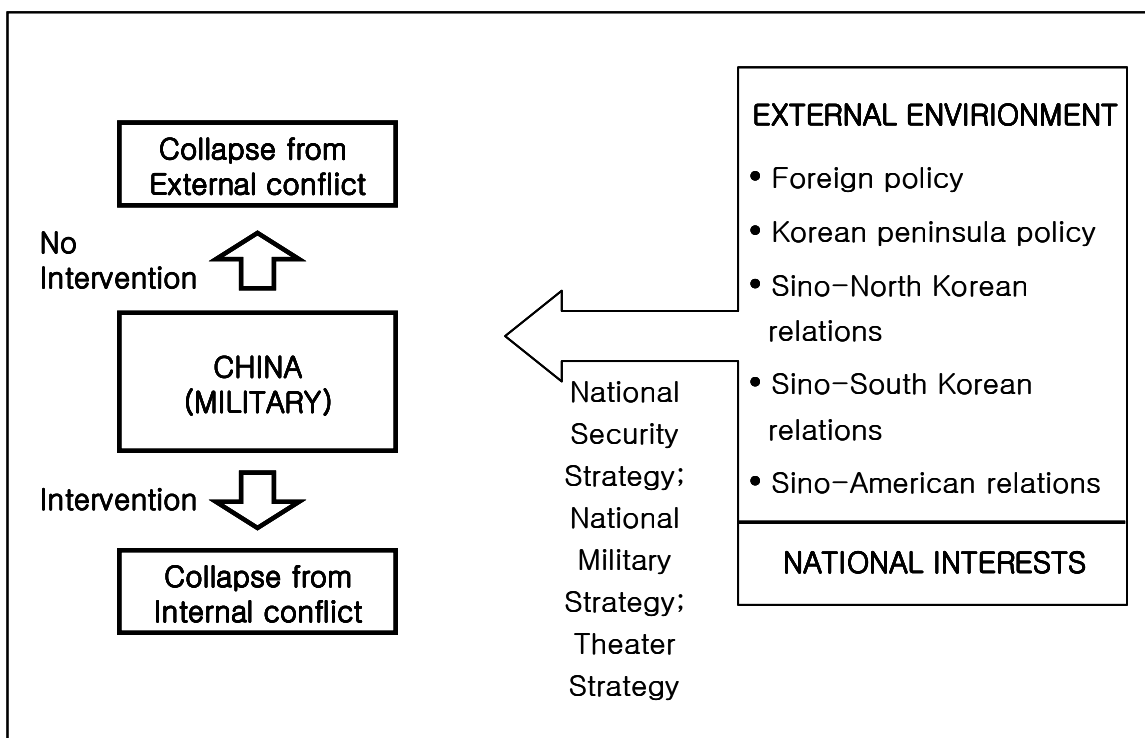


Figure 5. Possibility of Chinese military intervention on the Korean Peninsula
 Source: Created by author.

Most studies propose that China, as the military ally of North Korea, would conduct a rapid military intervention. However, this study argues that China's military

intervention would be decided according to the nature of North Korean collapse, i.e., internal conflict-driven collapse or collapse from external factors. Continued economic development is the ultimate goal of China and China pursues this by establishing an advantageous international environment while avoiding conflict with the United States. However, if a sudden change in North Korea were to occur through external factors and if China did decide to intervene militarily, it would be difficult for China to avoid colliding with the ROK or the ROK-US combined forces. Therefore, even though North Korea is China's military ally as well as its strategic buffer, China would attempt to avoid a military intervention on the Korean Peninsula when a North Korean collapse is caused by an external factor. This is because China would place greater importance on issues such as China's continued economic development, its relationship with the United States, China's position in the international system, territorial integrity with Taiwan, and China's military capabilities compared to the US. However, if a collapse were caused by internal conflicts, China would attempt to make a rapid military intervention to secure WMD in North Korea, interdict North Korean DP, control borderline, and stabilize North Korea.

Regarding the third research question, this study applied Lykke's model for military strategy to analyze how China's military would intervene in the event of a sudden change in North Korea.

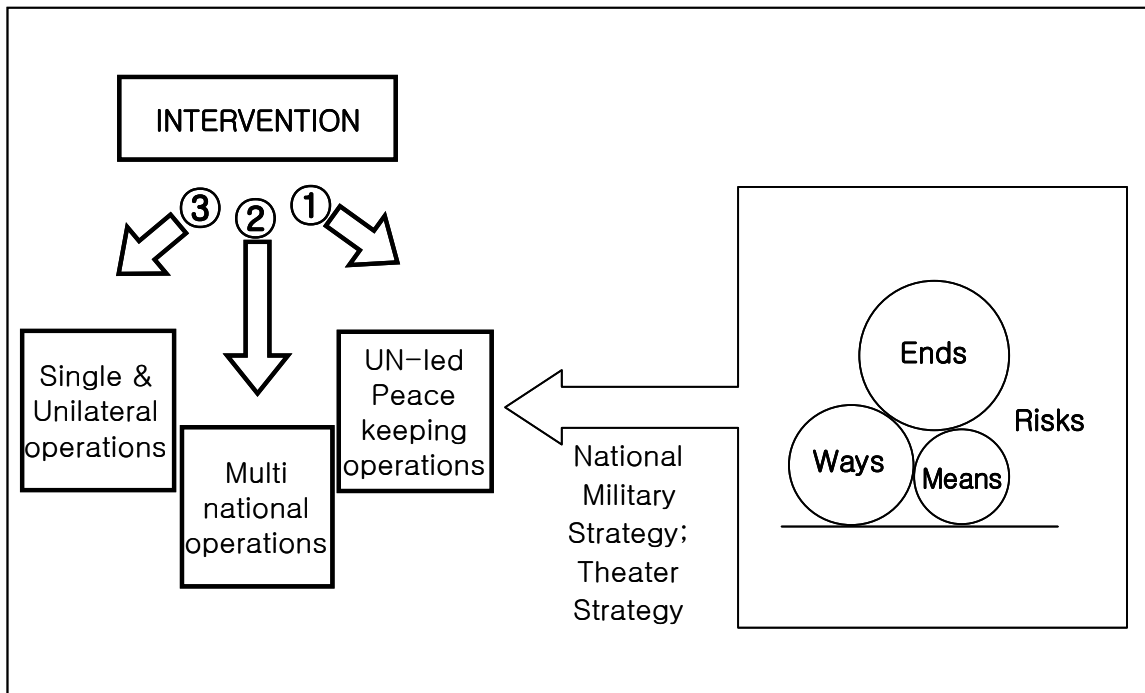


Figure 6. China's preference for military intervention on the Korean Peninsula
Source: Created by author.

There have been many studies on China's potential military intervention on the Korean Peninsula and most of the studies propose that China's PLA would intervene through the single and unilateral operations based on China's external environment and the strategic value of North Korea. However, this study took the position that China would compare the objectives (ends), tasks (ways), capabilities (means), and risks of the potential military interventions at the military strategy level if, at the national strategic level, they decided to intervene militarily. Single and unilateral intervention by the PLA would involve too many tasks, over extended capabilities, and unacceptably high risks due to the ongoing need to prevent a potential independence movement by Taiwan, the interdiction of the ROK or the ROK-US combined forces, the securing WMD spread

widely throughout North Korea, a 1,400 kilometer long border control, and stability operations dealing with 23 million people. Therefore, China would avoid the single and unilateral intervention.

China's intervention through multinational paradigm may share the tasks (ways) within the coalition and lower risks by avoiding a military conflict with the ROK or the ROK-US combined forces. However, if the formation of the MNF was delayed or the coalition was led by a country that did not allow China to pursue its own interests, it is unlikely that China could keep its dominant role in North Korea. Even if China becomes the lead nation, the PLA has limited experience in multinational operations and overseas stability operations. Furthermore, it is expected that the North Korean population would strongly resist the PLA if it pursued the rebuilding of the North Korean regime. Thus, even though multinational operations have more advantages and less risk compared to single and unilateral intervention, it is unlikely that China would select multinational operations.

Finally, if China intervened as a member of a UN-led PKF, some level of risk would still exist due to possible delays in the approval from the UN Security Council and formation of the PKF, and North Koreans' hostile resistance against China's PKF. However, intervention through PKO has less risk and keeps relatively balanced ends, ways, and means considering China's position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the PLA's rich experiences in PKO. Therefore, there are many reasons for supposing that China's first choice for intervening on the Korean Peninsula would be as a member of a UN-led PKF.

Recommendations

If a sudden change in North Korea becomes a reality, it will be a critical incident affecting the overall political and economic environment of Northeast Asia, influencing South Korea with the greatest impact. If China, one of the most important variables in the situation, intervenes as it did in the past, the Korean Peninsula may be swept up by another war. However, this study concludes that China would prefer to be part of a UN-led PKO as it pursues the rebuilding of a pro-China North Korean regime. Here, four recommendations are suggested as to what and how South Korea should prepare to protect the nation's freedom and preserve peace as well as to turn the incident into an opportunity to unify the Korean Peninsula.

1. Establish a detailed action plan in coordination with the United States. South Korea, in close cooperation with the United States, should conduct concrete research and develop a detailed contingency plan regarding a sudden change in North Korea. It is important to have an agreement on the desired end state between South Korea and the United States. In the event of a sudden change in North Korea, South Korea should focus its efforts on stabilizing the North while minimizing the impact of the incident and developing the situation as an opportunity for unification. The urgent task for the United States would be to protect its allied partner, South Korea, while securing the nuclear weapons in North Korea. Clearly, the national interests of both countries have a great deal of overlap. Through detailed cooperation, both countries should expand their common interests and demonstrate the unified effort in the incident. In particular, contingency plans for each scenario of North Korean collapse should be developed. This means that the Concept plan 5029 should be developed into operational plans. However,

considering the political sensitivity of such planning, official comments should be minimized to avoid needless controversy. Detailed plans should be drawn to secure WMD, control the DP, and stabilize the North Korean population. Additionally, personnel, resources, and facilities required to respond to the event must be prepared. Action plans must also address each possible type of Chinese military intervention. Even though this study proposes that China would prefer to join UN-led PKO, South Korea and the United States should build contingency plans against all potential types of Chinese military intervention. Lastly, both South Korea and the United States have to continuously develop the plans in detail, reframing the problem as needed, through combined exercises on a regular basis.

2. Strengthen ties and build confidence with China. As mentioned earlier, in case of a North Korean collapse, one of the critical variables is China. Since diplomatic relations were established, Sino-South Korean relations have developed dramatically. However, both countries have very different perspectives and interests regarding a sudden change in North Korea. Therefore, South Korea should develop not only economic relations but also political and military relations with China so that China could view a unified Korea not as a threat but as a development that would promote China's national interests. Considering the fact that China does not want to deal with this issue officially in order not to irritate North Korea, South Korea should utilize multiple tracks to pursue this goal.

3. Build a cooperation system with neighboring countries. A sudden change in North Korea is a matter of concern not only to South Korea, China, and the United States. Many North Korean DP would escape to Russia and North Korean WMD may flow into

the hands of separatists in Russia as well. In addition, some DP may go to Japan across the sea. Thus, the instability caused by a North Korean collapse would bring problems to neighboring countries. South Korea should build a relationship with neighboring countries that would provide a solid base of support for a South Korea-led stability operation and unification.

4. Increase participation in UN-led PKO and multinational operations. It is estimated that a great effort is required to stabilize North Korea. For this, South Korea should actively participate in UN-led PKO and multinational operations to accumulate experience and know-how. This effort would not only cultivate the South Korean capability to conduct stability operations in North Korea but also, through the contribution to the international society, draw global support for a South Korea-led unification.

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